

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, November 7, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 240.

NEW YORK. JANUARY 7, 1903.

Price 5 Cents.

HOOK AND LADDER JACK, THE DARING YOUNG FIREMAN.

By EX-FIRE CHIEF WARDEN.



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Hook and Ladder Jack, THE DARING YOUNG FIREMAN.

By **Ex-Fire Chief Warden.**

CHAPTER I.

"FIRE!"—HOOK AND LADDER JACK—THE PERILOUS RESCUE.

"Clang! Clang! Clang!"

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

"Clang! Clang!"

There was a rushing of men and women out of the great factories and business houses in the town of Waterville. The cry of fire there meant much more there than it did in the great cities. All the great factories, warehouses, and places of business, were built of wood and like tinder-boxes.

Men with blanched faces hurried out and looked anxiously up and down the streets. They mentally calculated the velocity of the wind and the direction.

"Ding! Ding! Ding!"

"Clear the way there!"

"Where's the fire?"

"At the factory. See the smoke there? God help the poor girls in the upper stories."

"Ding! Ding!"

"Here comes No. 2! Clear the way there! Look out! My God! That little girl came near being run over!"

"Make way there! Here comes Hook and Ladder Jack! Stand back! Stand back! Hook and Ladder—quick. Look! The poor girls are leaping from the windows!"

Hook and Ladder No. 1 dashed up to the scene of the fire amidst the wildest excitement imaginable.

Several of the girls had sprung from the windows to the pavement below. To be crushed to death in a fall was preferable to death by burning.

But there were still more in the building.

"There's another! Look! She dare not jump! She runs back, and will try to run down the stairs! God help her!"

A wild cheer burst from the excited, roaring multitude.

"Hook and Ladder Jack! Hook and Ladder Jack!" cried hundreds as the young foreman of the hook and ladder dashed up to the burning building, trumpet in hand.

Just then a cry of horror burst from the multitude.

A young girl appeared at one of the fourth-story windows. She looked down at the seething mass of humanity, clasped

her hands in an agony of terror, and disappeared from the window.

"God help her!"

"Save the poor girl!"

"There she is again!"

"For the love of God save her!"

Hook and Ladder Jack looked up and caught a glimpse of the fair young face surrounded by smoke, until it looked more like that of an angel peeping through moving clouds.

Up went his trumpet to his lips.

"Run the ladder up to that window!" he yelled, and every man, woman and child in that throng heard the order.

But ere the last word died away in the din and confusion of sounds, the young foreman dashed into the building and rushed up the stairs.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed firemen and citizens alike. "Jack will be lost. He can't get out alive."

The hook and ladder men tugged away at the ladder like heroes, to get it up to the window where the young girl was last seen.

But an accident delayed them in their work.

Somebody cut several telegraph wires and they fell across the ladder. In trying to shake them off the wires became entangled in the rungs of the ladder.

"Down! Down with it!" cried the assistant foreman.

"Cut the wires!"

"Pull 'em away!"

Telegraph wires are not as easily cut or broken as common twine.

"Get the nippers!"

"Hurry up or Jack will be roasted!"

"There he is! There he is! He has got her! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah for Hook and Ladder Jack!"

Jack suddenly appeared at the window, and with the young girl in his arms. He put his trumpet to his lips and sung out:

"Send up that ladder!"

But the hurraing of that immense multitude below was like the roaring of the ocean in a storm. Not a word from his trumpet did they hear.

Suddenly two red, fiery tongues of flame shot past on either side of them, like flaming serpents coiling about him and his fair burden.

"Oh, God! Look at that! The flames are crowding him! Look! Look! He is going to jump to the ground! Don't jump! For God's sake wait!"

Jack sprang upon the window sill with the fair girl in his arms. The red tongues of flames curled over his head, shot past him upon either side, and even darted out from between his legs.

"Send up that ladder!" he called from his trumpet again, and then like a hero, defying the fiery demon behind him, he stood there and watched the hook and ladder men working at the ladder below.

He was seen to speak words of cheer to the young girl, who clung to his neck as the only hope of escape from a terrible death.

At last his clothes were seen to take fire.

"Hurry up!" screamed men in the crowd. "Such a man is worth a thousand lives! His clothes are on fire."

The wires were at last cut away. The tall ladder was run up to the window.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Come down, Jack! Be careful, don't fall! Hold on to her! How the tall ladder sways! He is coming down."

The tall ladder reached the window sill upon which he was standing. He turned around with his face toward the flames and carefully put his right foot on the top rung. Then the other followed. Then another step; then he caught the top rung with his right hand, whilst his left arm encircled the young girl's waist.

Cheer after cheer went up from the excited multitude as he slowly made his way down the ladder. As he passed the window below the one he had just left, a huge volume of flame and smoke belched forth, and completely enveloped him, hiding him from the view of those below.

"He's lost!" went up in a great cry of dismay.

"No, there he is! Heavens! What a man! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah for Hook and Ladder Jack!"

Steadily he came down the ladder. Half the hair had been burned from the young girl's head. Her dress was on fire. So were Jack's pantaloons at his ankles.

Steady, step by step, he descended, till at last he reached the ground. A cheer like the roar of the old ocean went up, and the crowd made a rush to get at him.

But the firemen and police beat them back.

The young girl had fainted dead away. Jack was so exhausted that he could not stand on his feet. He sank down to the ground, but did not lose self-control.

"Take him up!"

"Carry him away!"

"He's a hero!"

"Hurrah for Jack Conway!"

"Hip—hip—hurrah—hurrah!"

"Stand back!" cried the police as the enthusiastic crowd tried to get at the young hero.

The young girl was taken in the arms of a sturdy son of toil, and carried through the crowd toward a hydrant across the street. The surging mass of humanity crowded around him.

"Who is she?"

"Is she burned?"

"Is she dead?"

"Where's brave Jack?"

Jack was taken by two of the hook and ladder men and led away. The last of the operatives had been taken out, and now the engines were pouring streams of water upon the burning building. The hook and ladder could do no more now. The big building was doomed.

"Jack! Jack Conway!" cried hundreds as the young fireman was led away. "Hook and Ladder Jack, the hero!"

A woman rushed by the police, threw her arms around the young hero's neck, and kissed him. Then she darted back into the crowd and was lost sight of, ere any one but Jack had got sight of her face.

CHAPTER II.

THE HERO OF THE FIRE.

Jack Conway was the foreman of Hook and Ladder No. 1, of the town of Waterville. He was just twenty-one years of age; lithe, active and strong; with raven hair and eyes that glittered like ebony diamonds, and seemed to look clear through one. He was considered by all the girls of Waterville as the handsomest young man in town. He was an engineer in one of the largest factories in the town, and earned good wages and took care of his money.

Waterville is a large manufacturing town within easy distance of New York. The reader will not find it on the map for the reason that the map-makers didn't put it down under that name. We call it Waterville because we do not care to give away some people who would be readily recognized were we to give the real name of the town. As truth is more strange than fiction, the reader will not wonder that the name of the town is cloaked under that of another.

The majority of the factories of Waterville were built of wood. Wood is cheaper than brick or stone. It also burns quicker. That human life was in danger, was of no consequence to the wealthy owners. To save their lives in case of fire, the operatives of the different factories organized several fire companies, and the town furnished the engines.

Being popular with his acquaintances, young Jack Conway was elected assistant foreman of Hook and Ladder, No. 1. At the very first fire, he saved two lives at the peril of his own. Everybody praised him. The papers called him a hero. He never shirked his duty nor held back in the face of danger.

On several other occasions he distinguished himself by saving the life of a rich old man—a miserly old millionaire—who cursed him for not bringing his old bull's eye English watch out with him.

"Well, old man," he said, "I will take you back and get the watch, if you will agree to it."

Of course, he did not agree and Jack went on with his work.

Having on another occasion saved the life of an old woman by crawling through a window, out of which smoke and flame were belching, and bringing her out, the girls in the lace factory held a meeting one day, during lunch hour, and passed resolutions of thanks to him for his gallant conduct. One little fourteen year old miss, who could not remember his surname, called him "Hook and Ladder Jack," and it took like milk and peaches. Everybody called him "Hook and Ladder Jack" after that.

Having given the reader the facts in regard to our hero, we will proceed with our story.

Jack was led away by two of his comrades, and taken through the crowd to a small hotel one block away from the scene of the fire. He was as weak as a "sick kitten," as he expressed it, and was unable to walk without the assistance of his comrades. They led him into a back room of the hotel and laid him down on the lounge.

"Here, Jack, my boy" one of them exclaimed, "a glass of brandy will wake you up. Drink it down and make no face about it."

He would have refused it, but the glass was pressed to his lips and he swallowed the contents.

The room was quickly jammed full of men eager to see the hero of the fire.

"Jack," said one of his chums, a member of Hook and Ladder No. 1, "how do you feel now?"

"Used up," he said. "I never had such a strain on me in all my life. That girl was as solid as lead, and felt as heavy when I stood with her in my arms upon that ledge. It was because I had such a narrow footing that I had to strain every nerve in my body to keep my position. She is a brave girl, though. Who is she?"

No one knew.

"She said to me once to let her drop and save myself. But I did not listen to that. When the blaze caught her hair, she again asked me to let her drop. 'Life is nothing to me,' she said, 'and it will soon be over if you let me drop. I will only cause your death.' I said that I would save her or die trying and she shut up her eyes and clung to me just as I told her to. She is a brave young girl. Does anybody know how many there are hurt?"

"Several jumped from the upper stories, and were either killed or badly hurt, poor girls!" said a fireman that came in at that moment.

"Here's a girl who says that it was Cora Edgeworth, you saved, Jack!" cried a man at the door trying to get in.

"Cora Edgeworth!" exclaimed another. "Oh, I know her. She and her widowed mother live down in Meadow Lane. She works in the shoe factory and supports her invalid mother."

"Poor girl!" said another. "It will go hard with them now. She is not only hurt, but thrown out of a position, besides."

"I don't think she is really much hurt," remarked Jack, "unless the shock has hurt her. Her hair was burned nearly off on one side of her head, but she did not complain of being hurt."

Hook and Ladder Jack remained at the hotel an hour or so, and then, feeling strong again, went back to his post. Wild cheers greeted his appearance on the ground, but he did not seem to know that they were intended for him.

There was very little for the hook and ladder company to do. The factory was a total ruin. It had burned completely to the ground, and was now nothing but a heap of red, hissing embers.

Jack ordered the company back to their quarters, and as it started off, the multitude cheered Jack again.

Soon after they reached their quarters, the surgeon of the fire department came around to see Jack.

"Jack, my dear boy," he said to the young hero as he wrung his hand. "I congratulate you. You have done a gallant act, and won everybody's heart in Waterville."

"I am glad to hear that, doctor," he said laughingly, "for one wants all the friends he can get, you know."

"Yes, yes. You will never want for friends in Waterville, Jack Conway. And now look here. You must go and take a rest after this terrific strain. You need it. They tell me that you were too weak to stand up after you reached the ground."

"Yes, I did feel as weak as boarding-house tea, Doc, but I guess I am all right now."

"No, you are not all right," said the doctor. "You need rest and you ought to take it."

"Well, I will go back to the factory and see how my engine is getting along, and then go home."

"Very well. Do not fail to do so, or you may regret it."

The doctor didn't know as much about the young engineer as he thought he did. Hook and Ladder Jack had a constitution like that of the United States—the more it is broken, the stronger it becomes. Jack went back to his engine, which he had left in charge of his assistant, Peter Murray, and stayed until the great whistle blew the signal for the two

thousand operatives in the great factory, to stop work for the day.

CHAPTER III.

TOM HARDIN AND EVELYN CASSEL SEE DORA HOME.

When one of the stalwart operatives took the girl whom Hook and Ladder Jack had rescued from the flames, in his arms and bore her away from the surging mass of humanity, another girl followed him. She pushed and elbowed her way along until he reached the hydrant, where he stopped and vainly tried to get water to dash in her face.

"Take her to her home! Take her to her home!" chorused a thousand voices at once.

"Who is she? Where does she live?" queried the man, looking around at the eager faces around him.

A policeman rushed in to disperse the crowd.

"Clear the way!" he ordered in brutal tones. "Get out of the way! Stand back! Stand back, sir!" Whack! whack! whack! and he rained blows with his club on the head of the man with the unconscious girl, until he sank to the ground, bleeding from half a dozen wounds.

"Shame! Shame!" cried several voices.

"An outrage! An outrage! Kill the brute! Beat him with his own club. Give him some of his grub!" and the angry hard sons of toil rushed upon the brutal officer, tore his club from his hands, his clothes from his back, beat him to the earth, and trampled him under foot.

It became a mob in a few minutes, and other officers nearby undertook to disperse them. The angry men were in no humor to stand any interference from any of the force. The result was, that instead of dispersing the mob, the mob dispersed them. They dispersed quickly, too, and fled to the station-house for reinforcements.

The greatest excitement prevailed. The rumore flew in every direction that a riot was in progress, and no man's life was safe if found on the streets.

Thousands of people rushed to their homes and stayed there the rest of the day. But many hundred remained near the scene of the fire until a platoon of police came and drove them away.

During the rush on the brutal police officer, the young girl, Cora Edgeworth, was badly trampled, but being utterly unconscious, did not feel the pain of it. The young girl who had identified her as she was carried in the stalwart operative's arms, clung to her all through the tumult, and though badly trampled herself, succeeded in getting a man to take her up and rush out of the crowd with her.

"Oh, mercy," cried the girl. "I am trampled almost to death. I do hope poor Cora has no bones broken. Please take her away from this awful crowd, sir."

"Yes, I will," replied the young man, making a run with her toward an express wagon, which was standing on a side street some little distance from the fire. He laid her gently down in the wagon.

"Hello!" exclaimed the driver. "Is she dead?"

"No," replied the man, "she has only fainted. Take her home."

"Where does she live?"

"Down in Meadow Lane," was the reply the young girl who had stood by her so faithfully, made.

"Why, that's nigh on to two miles!"

"Yes; but I will pay you for it," she said.

"All right. Jump up here."

The man assisted her into the wagon. She sat down by Cora and took her head in her lap. Then she looked around

at the young man who had rendered her such timely assistance and said:

"You have been so kind. Will you not go with us, sir?"

"Yes, miss, if you think best," he replied.

"Oh, please go."

He sprang up on the wagon and seated himself by the driver. The wagon went off at a brisk pace and in a few minutes they were out of sight of the crowd.

Poor Cora was covered with mud and bruises. The water from the engines ran about the streets. When the crowd rushed upon the policeman, she was rolled in the mud with her brave defender.

The jolting of the wagon as it rolled over the pavements soon restored her to consciousness. She opened her eyes and moaned.

"Oh, Cora," exclaimed the young girl, "you are safe. Are you hurt?"

"Where am I?" Cora asked, raising her hand to her forehead.

"In a wagon on your way home. Are you in any pain?"

"I—don't know, Evelyn."

"What is it, Cora?" and Evelyn Cassel bent her head down so as to catch the words.

"He was so brave—so kind. Did— he—"

"Yes, Cora," interrupted Evelyn, on seeing her so weak. "He escaped unhurt."

"I am so—glad," she murmured, and then she closed her eyes again.

"Do you know who he was, Cora?" Evelyn asked.

Cora made no answer.

She was half unconscious again. The gallant young man by the driver turned to Evelyn and said:

"Is she better?"

"Yes, I think so, but I fear that she is badly hurt," she replied.

"I hope not. Poor thing," and he looked so sympathetic, that she asked:

"Will you please give me your name, sir?"

"Yes, miss, my name is Tom Hardin. I work at the jewelry factory on the hill."

"Thank you, Mr Hardin. I want to be able to tell her who you are, when she is able to talk."

"Will you tell me who she is?" he asked

"Yes. Cora Edgeworth," was the reply.

"And you?"

"Evelyn Cassel."

"Thank you, Miss Cassel."

They reached the little street where the Edgeworths lived, and Evelyn pointed out the modest little cottage to the driver.

The driver drove up to the gate and Hardin sprang to the ground to help Cora out.

"Hold on, there," said the driver. "No goods delivered until paid for."

"Just wait till I come out and I —"

"Pay now!" said the driver, leaping to the ground, "or there will be trouble—one dollar and a half, sir. Fifty cents each," and he held his hand out to Hardin.

"I will pay it," said Evelyn, hastily feeling for her pocket-book.

"No, no, Miss Cassel," said Tom, quickly withdrawing his pocketbook. "Here, change that!" and handed him a twenty dollar bill.

"Can't change it," said the driver.

"Change a ten?"

"No."

"Five?"

"No, got no change."

Tom fished down into his pocket again and fished out three silver half dollars and gave them to him, saying:

"Just wait till I come out, and I will give you another chance to double that."

"All right," said the driver.

Tom then took Cora in his arms and carried her to the house. Evelyn had gone ahead and rung the bell and brought Mrs. Edgeworth to the door.

"Mrs. Edgeworth," said Evelyn, "there has been a fire at the factory, and Cora has fainted from fright."

The mother, a pale, delicate woman, caught a glimpse of the limp, bruised form of her daughter—her only child—and uttering a piercing scream, sank down at Evelyn Cassel's feet in a death-like swoon.

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Evelyn. "She has fainted, too. Here, Mr. Hardin, put Cora down on the bed in this room, and take up poor Mrs. Edgeworth!"

Tom did as he was directed, and in a minute mother and daughter were lying side by side on the same bed.

Tom was a cool-headed fellow. He had heard that cold water dashed in the face would restore consciousness to a fainted person. Seeing a pitcher of water near, he took it up and dashed some in the faces of both.

The effect was even better than he had expected.

Cora gasped, struggled a moment, and then opened her eyes, as if suddenly awaking out of a sound sleep, and looking quickly around the room, recognized where she was.

"You are better now," said Evelyn, bending over and kissing her.

"Yes—yes, where is mother?"

"There she is. She is just getting over a faint."

That aroused all Cora's love for her mother. She sprang and threw herself forward with a wailing cry that touched the heart of Tom Hardin, who quickly slipped out of the house and joined the driver of the express wagon.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BRUTAL EXPRESSMAN—THE SILKEN TRESSES—JACK AND THE LAWYER.

When he joined the driver, though, there was "blood in his eye."

The driver noticed it at first. He was in a hurry.

"Here, git in," he said to Tom.

"Get in!" exclaimed Tom, his eyes blazing with honest indignation. "You get out, you inhuman brute. You had no sympathy for the poor girl—would have kept her here until you were paid. I said I would give you a chance to make double your charge. Just bounce out of that wagon, and if I don't wipe up this whole street with you, I will give you three dollars."

The driver made a dash at him, and Tom met him half way.

Whack!

Whack!

Whack!

The blows rained thick and fast, and in half a minute the driver went down.

Tom didn't stand on ceremony on waiting for him to get up again. He took him by the heels and dragged him all around the street, rolling him over occasionally to give him the full benefit of the proceedings.

"Enough!" cried the driver, after about five minutes of such exercise. "Lemme up."

"Get up and get out of this," said Tom, dropping the man's feet and turning away.

The driver rose to his feet, and with a four pound stone in his hand. He hurled it at Tom's head with all his might. It just grazed Tom's ear and struck the horse between the eyes.

Down went the horse, his skull crushed as though a cannon-ball had struck him.

Tom wheeled and dealt the cowardly wretch a stunning blow between the eyes which laid him out at full length upon the ground. He then turned and walked away, his hands in his pockets and whistling like a schoolboy.

The driver slowly rose to his feet and surveyed the damage.

His wagon, though overturned, was uninjured. But his horse was as dead as a smoked herring. He knew he had killed him with the stone he had intended for Tom Hardin. But that did not reconcile him any more to his loss. He swore like a pirate. A score of women and children were witnesses from the windows of the houses surrounding.

Evelyn Cassel was looking on from a window in the front of the Edgeworth cottage. The expressman saw her.

"Here ma'am!" he cried, rushing inside the gate and up to the house, "pay me for my horse, or I will have you arrested."

Evelyn was equal to the occasion. She said:

"I saw you throw that stone at Mr. Hardin. You missed him and hit your horse. As it killed the horse, it shows that you threw it hard enough for to kill Mr. Hardin. If you don't clear out at once, I will send for the police and have you arrested for an attempt at murder."

The expressman turned pale. He saw things in a different light at once. Inwardly hoping that Hardin would not report him, he hastily left the place to go in search of another horse to pull his wagon away.

Evelyn Cassel returned to assist Mrs. Edgeworth in attending to Cora. The poor girl was badly burned in several places. A physician was sent for, who prescribed the proper medicines, and said that she was in no danger whatever, and that she would be out again in a few days. When he went away, they all had lighter hearts and they began talking about the incidents of the fire.

"Who was he?" Cora asked of Evelyn that evening as she sat by her side.

"Jack Conway."

"Jack Conway?"

"Yes, Hook and Ladder Jack," said Evelyn.

"Oh, was it? I just like him. Evelyn, he saved my life."

"Of course, he did. Ten thousand people must have been witnesses of his brave act."

"I shall never forget how cool and brave he was," Cora said after a pause. "He must be as strong as a lion, for I am not a very small girl."

"I saw him sink down to the ground from exhaustion, the moment he reached the bottom of the ladder," said Evelyn.

"Indeed! I hope he was not hurt in any way."

"So do I."

"Cora," said her mother, "you will have to have your hair cut off on the other side, now."

She put her hand up, and felt of the long silken tresses that must come off. The left side was so badly singed that the whole must go.

Tears came into her eyes, for she had long prized her splendid tresses.

"Cut it off," said Evelyn, "and present it to Jack Conway in the shape of a pretty watch-chain."

Cora stared at her friend as if the suggestion was an entirely novel one.

"I will do it," she finally remarked. "Here, cut it off, mother."

Mrs. Edgeworth procured a pair of scissors and gave them to Evelyn.

"You cut it, child," she said, her voice faltering. "I cannot do it."

Evelyn took the scissors and quickly severed the tresses from the head of the fair girl, and wrapped them in a bit of newspaper, saying:

"I will make the chain, myself, and bring it to you."

"Thank you, Evelyn," said Cora, her eyes filling with tears. "You are so kind."

"You would be as kind to me, Cora," said Evelyn. "I know you would," and she leaned over and kissed her.

A week passed and Cora Edgeworth was up again. But her occupation was gone. There was but one lace factory in town, and in that one she had learned how to work lace. Starvation stared her and her mother in the face. They were in the deepest distress when the bright, cheery face of Evelyn Cassel was seen at the door of their cottage.

"Oh, Cora! Just see what a pretty chain I have made from the hair," exclaimed Evelyn, showing a beautiful watch-chain, mounted in gold.

Cora turned pale.

"Evelyn!" she almost gasped as she looked at the chain, "that has cost us as much as three or four dollars, and we have not as much as a dollar in the house."

"Oh, dear! Is it as bad as that, Cora?"

"Yes," was the choking reply.

"Well, never mind, dear. I have got three hundred dollars in the bank and I will let you have some. You can repay me some day. Don't cry now, dear—I—I——" and then, girl-like, Evelyn herself burst into tears, and threw her arms around Cora's neck.

"Rap—rap—rap!"

"Oh, there is somebody at the door," exclaimed Cora.

Both girls sprang up and looked at each other.

"I will go to the door," said Evelyn, wiping away her tears. "You have been crying like a silly goose until you look perfectly horrid."

Cora burst out laughing through her tears.

"So have you, Miss Impudence. Better wash your eyes. They are as red as——"

"Rap—rap—rap!" went the brass knocker on the door.

Evelyn snatched up a towel, hastily dampened a corner of it and rubbed her eyes. Then she hastened to open the door.

The visitor was a man of middle age with a small patch of beard on his chin.

"You take your time coming out to the door, ma'am," was the gruff remark he made as he stepped inside. "I want to see Mrs. Edgeworth."

"Pray, sir, who are you? The Governor? Or, maybe you are the president of——"

"I am Lawyer Skinner, the agent of the owner of this property," was the gruff reply. "Where is Mrs. Edgeworth?"

Mrs. Edgeworth heard his voice and came out into the hall pale and trembling.

"Ah, Mrs. Edgeworth," said the lawyer, "I have come for the rent, Mrs. Edgeworth; I hope you have it ready, as I have instructions to ——"

"No, sir, I have not the money to-day," said Mrs. Edgeworth. "We are so ——"

"Yes, yes—I know. You have not the money, and don't know when you will have it. Just so. But we have the house, you know. People who pay no rent, and don't own a house, can't live in one. I'll have the rent to-morrow by twelve o'clock, or out you go!"

"Rap—rap—rap!"

Evelyn flew to the door and opened it.

"Why, Mr. Conway!" she exclaimed. "Hook and Ladder Jack, as I live! Come in."

Jack took off his hat, stepped inside, bowed to Evelyn, and then to Mrs. Edgeworth.

"Oh, sir!" cried Mrs. Edgeworth, going forward and grasping his hand, "a mother's blessing is yours! May Heaven bless you for saving my child from a horrible death!"

"Thanks, ma'am," said Jack. "I called to pay my respects to the young lady and ——"

"Do you understand me, madam?" blurted out Lawyer Skinner. "No whining to-morrow. Nothing but money, or out you go on the ——"

"This to a lady!" indignantly exclaimed Jack, wheeling and grasping the lawyer by the throat. "Down on your knees and beg her pardon, or by the strength of my good right arm, I'll spoil your beauty forever!"

CHAPTER V.

HOOK AND LADDER JACK SKINS THE SKINNER AND MAKES CORA CRY.

The lawyer cowered like a whipped spaniel in the grasp of the daring young fireman.

"Oh, Lord, don't strike me!" he begged. "I—I——. Don't don't!"

"Down on your knees, I say!" hissed Jack.

"This is actionable. I protest."

"Certainly it is actionable," retorted Jack, shaking him until his false teeth rattled in his mouth; "and if you are not lively, I will make a stiff of you. Do you understand?"

"Blackstone and Story!" gasped Skinner. "This is too much. I—I—will have the law on you for this!"

"Down on your knees. One, two——Ah! Now beg the lady's pardon. Speak out like a man!"

"Madame, I—I—beg pardon. I—I——"

"Oh, Mr. Conway!" exclaimed the widow, "let him go, please."

"Yes, ma'am. Get up, you terrible insulter of ladies!" and Jack seized him by the collar of his coat and lifted him to his feet as though he were merely a ten year old boy. "What do you want here?"

"I came for the rent!" replied Skinner, reduced to a civil answer at last.

"And was that why you insulted the lady? How much was due you?"

"Ten dollars!"

And because ten dollars was not withcoming, you insulted the lady. By my soul, I am tempted to put a string around your neck and lead you to the dog-pound. Here's ten dollars. Write the receipt and send it to the lady."

He gave the agent a ten-dollar bill and waited for the receipt. The receipt was already written out and signed.

"Now, see here, sonny," added Jack as he took the receipt and gave it to Mrs. Edgeworth, "my name is Jack Conway. I am the engineer for Thompson & Son. I hope you will commence suit against me so that I will have a chance to show in court what kind of a beast you are. Make your bow to the ladies and take yourself off—quick."

He lost no time in getting out of the cottage. It was too close quarters for him altogether.

"Mr. Conway," said Mrs. Edgeworth, "I really don't know what to say. I ——"

"Never mind saying anything, ma'am," said Jack, interrupting her. "I happened to have money enough in my pocket and loaned it to you. Some day you can pay it back, and —— Ah, you are crying, ma'am. Have I offended? I beg a thousand pardons. I—I—didn't mean to ——"

"No—no—you have not offended," exclaimed Evelyn Cassel.

"Your kindness has touched her heart. Here, come into the sitting room. Cora will be in soon."

"Thanks, miss, I——"

"Take a seat," continued Evelyn. "I have seen you offer Mr. Conway—saw you at the lace factory fire—but you don't know me. My name is Evelyn Cassel. I am Cora's friend and I work in the silk mills."

"I am very happy in making your acquaintance, Miss Cassel. Tom Hardin came to see me and told me what a brave girl you are."

Evelyn looked around at the handsome young fireman and asked:

"Did he tell you what he had done, Mr. Conway?"

"He said he came home with you and Miss Edgeworth."

"Did he tell you how he punished that expressman?"

"No."

"Well, I will, then, just to get even with him. Then she gave him all the particulars of the fight between Hardin and the expressman, in front of the house.

"Good! Good for him!" exclaimed Jack. "I am glad he did that. Served him right, the unfeeling brute. I will give Hardin my hand on that when I see him again."

Just then Cora came in.

Though her long tresses had been cut off, she was still very beautiful. She had none of the air of the working girl about her, for she had been educated to a high degree.

Jack sprang to his feet and bowed low to her. She frankly extended her hand to him, saying:

"I am so glad you have called, Mr. Conway. I wanted to tell you so much how ——"

"Please don't say one word about thanks, Miss Edgeworth," he said, interrupting her. "I did just what it was my duty to do and I would do the same for any other one under similar circumstances. You acted so bravely that I wanted to see you again and know how you are getting along. That is why I called. I am glad to see that you are not much hurt."

"No—I have gotten over the burns as well as the shock," she replied. "I had to sacrifice my hair, however, and have had it fixed up for a present to you. It is all I had to give. Will you accept it, Mr. Conway?"

"Accept it? Why, Miss Edgeworth, I would prize it above anything I have."

"Here it is," and she pulled the handsome chain from her pocket and handed it to him.

He took it, looked at it in silence for a minute or two, and then said:

"It is beautiful. I will keep it until I lose my grip on life. Ten thousand dollars would not buy it from me."

He removed his plain gold watch-chain from his watch and attached the gift to his timekeeper.

Cora was charmed with his frankness, and seemed for the moment to forget her distress about losing her situation. She earned money enough in the factory to pay house rent, buy food and plain clothes for herself and mother. Of course she could put nothing in the bank under such circumstances.

"I am so glad you came," said Cora again, "but I am so afraid Mr. Skinner will make trouble for you. You ——"

"Don't bother about him, Miss Edgeworth," said he with a chuckle. "He won't bother. Depend upon it. I know how to deal with such men. Why I could raise a mob on him that would hang him to the nearest lamp-post."

"But—I—Mr. Conway, I don't know when we can repay you the money you loaned mother to-day," and her pretty face was crimsoned with blushes.

"Well, now, don't let that bother you until your hair grows a yard long again. Then I may claim just one strand for the ten dollars."

They all three indulged in a hearty laugh.

"You see, there are several hundred people thrown out of

employment by the fire," he added, "and many of them will suffer loss unless they are looked after. We are going to send an express wagon around here in a day or two with supplies for you and your mother—from Hook and Ladder No. 1. You are under our charge, you see—oh, don't cry about it now! It seems I am a brute—always making women cry! I wish I had the soft airs of a —"

"Jack Conway!" said Evelyn, "what true woman could keep back tears at such kindness as yours?"

"Oh, I thought I had offended. I am so rough in my way. Well, I could not be unkind to a woman, even to save my life."

"I believe you."

"Thanks. Jack Conway never harmed any one in his life, except in self-defense or in defense of a friend."

A little later Jack started to leave the cottage. Cora and Evelyn pressed him to stay to tea with them, and he did so. A charming little tea party it was.

After tea, Evelyn stated that she would return to her own home, and Jack tendered her his escort.

"Don't tell Tom Hardin," he remarked good-naturedly, "for he would be jealous."

"Oh, would he?"

"Yes, for he is a great admirer of yours, Miss Cassel."

"Thank the stars for that," said Evelyn, at which all there laughed heartily, and then they took leave of the Edgeworths and passed out.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUDDEN ATTACK AND A LUDICROUS MISTAKE.

Leaning confidently on the arm of Hook and Ladder Jack, Evelyn Cassel told him frankly how Widow Edgeworth was situated.

"Their sole dependence was Cora's earnings," said she, "and I am sure that they have not a dollar in the house now. They came to Waterville three years ago. Cora has been very highly educated and her manner is refined. They have moved in the best society elsewhere; of that I am sure, but they will say nothing of their past lives—keep it a profound secret from every one."

"You surprise me," said Jack. "I did not know but —"

Two men made a rush from a dark corner they were passing and made an attack upon the young fireman. Both were armed with clubs, and as one raised his cudgel to brain him, Evelyn uttered a scream, and darted aside in such a manner as to cause Jack to spring away at nearly the same time. The result was that both men landed their clubs on each other's heads, and dropped to the ground as though they had been shot.

"Well, well," exclaimed Jack, as he picked up the two clubs, "that takes the bun! They just tapped each other's brain pans as if they meant it."

"Oh, Mr. Conway," cried Evelyn, "didn't they intend to kill you?"

"I don't know, I am sure. They have pretty well finished each other, I guess. I'll see if I know either one of them."

He struck a match and held it near the faces of the two prostrate men.

"Mercy on me!" gasped Evelyn. "This is that expressman with whom Mr. Hardin had the fight."

"Eh? Is that so? Who is the other, then?"

"Indeed, I don't know."

"Wonder if they were sent here by Lawyer Skinner? With your permission, I will see what they know about it, as they are both coming to."

The blows had knocked both men senseless. They were

stunned for several minutes. Then they sat up, rubbed their eyes, felt their aching heads, and glared around as if wondering what had hurt them.

"Here, you two billy-goats," said Jack, accosting them, "what the deuce are you trying to batter your heads off for?"

"Eh?" muttered the expressman, rubbing his head and gazing up in a mystified way.

"What were you two fellows fighting about?"

"Eh? Fightin'?"

"Yes. You came near giving this young lady a tap on the head. What's the matter with you, anyway?"

Both men stared.

"It was all a mistake, sir."

"How?"

"You ain't the man."

"Oh, took me for another man, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, you came near killing the wrong man. Nice mistake to make. Who is your man?"

No reply.

Both got on their feet, looking decidedly groggy from the effects of the blows.

"Well, it is all right as long as the clubs struck where they could do the most good."

"See hyer? called the other man. "Ain't you Tom Hardin?"

"No," replied Jack.

Turning to the expressman, the fellow uttered a horrible oath and added:

"Sorry I didn't bust yer dratted nubbin fer yer."

"Hope I broke yourn," growled the expressman as they both moved away. They did not even stop to ask Jack for the two clubs he held in his hands.

"Mr. Conway," said Evelyn, as they resumed their walk, "I really believe that that expressman came here to waylay and beat Mr. Hardin, thinking he would be here."

"Of course he did. You have got it down about right. Oh, Lord! Didn't they just give each other a grand tap!" and he laughed heartily over the mistake.

Evelyn laughed, too. But she was, nevertheless, uneasy. She knew now, that the expressman intended to get even with Hardin in other than a legal way.

"You ought to tell Mr. Hardin," suggested Evelyn.

"Certainly! and give him these two clubs," was the reply.

"Yes; that's it. Let him have them to defend himself with."

Jack saw Evelyn Cassel to her humble home and then bade her good-night.

As it was yet quite early, he went in search of Tom Hardin, who had given him his address. He found him in his room. Hardin was surprised.

"Glad to see you, Conway!" he exclaimed, grasping his hand and giving it a cordial shake. "Take a seat."

"Haven't time, Hardin," said Jack. "I called to make you a little present. Here, what do you think of these?" and he held up the two formidable looking clubs for his inspection. Hardin gazed at them in a puzzled sort of way and asked:

"What in blue blazes are these for?"

"Where do you think I got them?"

"Hanged if my thinker can grasp it," replied Tom.

"Didn't you have a little business with an expressman down in Meadow Lane the other day?"

Tom smiled.

"Yes, I had a little dealing with one down there," was the reply, "but —"

"Well, he and a friend were down there this evening waiting for you. I called and took tea with the Edgeworths. Miss Cassel was there. She is a jewel of a girl, Mr. Hardin."

"Yes; I agree with you there."

"Well, I escorted her home. As we turned the first corner, two men rushed at me with uplifted clubs. We dodged out of

the way, and down came their clubs on each other's heads. They dropped to the ground like dead men. Miss Cassel recognized your expressman. He looked at me in dumb amazement, and remarked that they had made a mistake. I kept the clubs, and let them go off with their broken heads, and Miss Cassel suggests that as they were after you, I should deliver the clubs to you."

Tom Hardin took the clubs and critically examined them. They were large and heavy and amply sufficient to kill a man with at a single blow. One of them had a small patch of hair and blood upon it.

"I'd thank you to leave them with me," he finally remarked.

"Of course. That is what I brought them for. I say, Hardin, I want you to join Hook and Ladder No. 1. What say you?"

"Do you mean it?"

"I do."

"Then I will join. Propose me."

"All right. We have a lot of good fellows in the company."

"Yes, and some very daring fellows, too, I should say."

"Yes, some brave —"

Clang! Clang! Clang!

"Great Heavens! There's the fire-bell again!" and without so much as saying good evening to his host, Jack, Conway dashed out of the door and bounded down the flight of stairs four or five steps at a time.

CHAPTER VII.

"A BLACK ELEPHANT"—HOOK AND LADDER JACK'S RIDE.

The sudden clanging of the fire-bell was in consequence of a fire in a two story frame house in which four colored families were residing. Like all such houses after long use, it was a mere tinder box. The men sprang out of the house and escaped death by landing on their feet. The woman, weighing over 300 pounds, dare not jump. She stood at the window and screamed worse than a chorus of twenty locomotive whistles.

"Look heah," she screamed. "Don' yo'uns go for to leab me heah."

"Jump outen dar!" yelled her husband with frantic agony, "or yer grease will burn up the town! Jump, I tole yer!"

"Ef yer don't come out er thar, Keziah, dar will be nigger meat a roastin' here!" yelled another.

"Stop that noise and jump, I tole yer!" yelled her husband.

"Oh, Lord, save me!" yelled the fat wench, as volumes of smoke and cinders coiled out of the window beside her.

She was dressed in a white gown. The light cotton material took fire. She danced and screamed, but would not risk the jump.

The hoseman threw a stream of water on her. It knocked her back into the room. The negroes were indignant and yelled a chorus of direful threats at the hoseman.

"Hook and Ladder Jack!" cried some one as Hook and Ladder No. 1 dashed up to the fire.

"Oh, fer the lub of God, Massa Jack!" cried the frantic husband, rushing to the fireman, "sabe Keziah, sabe my ole woman!"

Jack looked up at the burning building and saw the white gown of the fat woman as she staggered to the window, gasping for breath.

"Put up the ladder, quick!" he yelled through his trumpet, and the moment it was placed against the burning building, he was the first to spring upon it.

Running up the ladder with the celerity of a squirrel going up a tree, he reached the window. The woman had fallen to the floor unconscious, choked with flame and smoke. He sprang inside and tempted to lift her in his arms.

"Jiminy!" he exclaimed. "She is a black elephant. Weighs a ton."

Leaning out of the window, he called through his trumpet:

"Bring up a rope!"

One of the men seized a coil of rope and dashed up the ladder.

Jack seized the rope, quickly passed it around the body of the woman and tied it.

"Help me put her out!" he called to the other fireman.

"Come out, Jack," replied the man. "It is too late!"

"Come in!" Jack fiercely ordered and the man started to obey.

But the moment he reached the window sill, a fierce blast of flame and smoke dashed right out in his face.

The fireman gasped, reeled, and fell to the ground with a heavy thud that sent a thrill of horror through the spectators.

"He is lost! He is lost!" cried the crowd. "Hook and Ladder Jack is lost!"

"No—there he is!"

"Look! He has the woman in his arms. Won't somebody run up to him?"

The assistant foreman ran up the ladder to him.

"Good for you, Bob!" cried Jack. "Take this rope and wrap it a dozen times around the rung there!"

Bob Kramer did as he was told, and quickly, too.

No sooner was it done than Jack lifted the great bulk of black flesh out of the window and let it swing by the rope.

Then the crowd caught on. They made the welkin ring with their shouts.

Even the firemen stopped to gaze at the daring hero who seemed to defy the flames in his efforts to save human life.

He sprang on the ladder, seized the rope, paid it out, and deliberately let the body down to the ground into the arms of a couple of firemen.

"Glory be ter Hook and Ladder Jack an' the Lord!" yelled the husband.

"Hurrah for Jack Conway!"

Jack was scorched in several places, but not seriously, and was able to be at his post in the mill next day. The papers were full of his gallant exploit, and rang his praises in a strain that made him blush to the tips of his ears.

But in his triumph he did not forget Cora Edgeworth and her widowed mother.

"Great God!" he suddenly exclaimed as he felt for his watch. "That hair chain is burnt to nothing! One piece was hanging to the watch, and another to the hook! Hanged if I wouldn't rather lost my ear!" and he felt grieved over the loss.

All day long the loss of the chain made from Cora Edgeworth's tresses preyed on his mind. He would not have grieved so much for one thousand dollars.

But he never flagged in his work. That evening he went to one of the corner groceries near the mill, and paid for a month's supply of provisions, which he directed to be sent to the widow Edgeworth, as coming from Hook and Ladder No. 1. The company was raising funds to relieve a score of others from the distress they were thrown into by the great fire.

"She shall not suffer as long as I have a dollar to spare," he muttered to himself, as he wended his way around to the hook and ladder headquarters. "She is a born lady, if there ever was one and as full of the graces of womanhood as any queen that ever lived."

CHAPTER VIII.

JACK IS SURPRISED—THE LAWYER AGAIN.

Several days after the fire in the negro quarter of the town, young Conway, after his day's work was done, put on his dress suit and called upon the Edgeworths.

The widow and her pretty daughter received him as their best friend.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Conway, the widow said as she led him into the little sitting-room. "You will always be welcomed."

"Oh, Mr. Conway!" exclaimed Cora, running into the room, "is it you? I am so glad to see you! I have been reading about you in the papers. Why didn't you snatch up that delicate young colored girl, and run down the ladder with her as you did with me?" and her silvery laugh rang through the little cottage like the tones of a silver bell."

"Miss Cora," he said, laughing good-naturedly, "I did my best, but she was too much for me. Do you know that I met with the greatest loss that night that ever befell me?"

"Indeed! Were you robbed?" and she leaned forward with an eager, sympathetic flush and glance in face and eyes.

"Yes, the flames ruined that hair chain. See here, that is all that is left of it," and he held out the remnant of the once beautiful chain for her to gaze upon.

"I am very sorry then, it was burned," she said, "but it was ruined in a good cause, and I will not complain. I promise you that when my hair grows out again, you shall have another one of it."

"Do you promise that, Miss Cora?"

"Yes; most sacredly."

"Why, what a strange compact!" exclaimed Mrs. Edgeworth, laughing. "I never heard of anything like it before."

"No, nor I," said Cora.

"Nor I," added Jack, "and that is why I like it."

"How singular it is," Mrs. Edgeworth remarked; "Cora received an offer of marriage this very —"

"Why mother!" exclaimed the daughter, her face flushing scarlet.

"Oh," replied Mrs. Edgeworth, "I may as well tell it as Mr. Conway knows the man. Now, who do you think it was, Mr. Conway?"

"Mother! Mother!" pleaded Cora, "don't talk about that now."

Jack was puzzled. He looked first at the mother and then at the daughter.

"Indeed!" he finally said. "I might guess a whole week and never hit the right one."

"So you would," remarked the mother, "it was none other than Mr. Skinner, the lawyer."

"What?" exclaimed Jack, almost bouncing out of the chair on which he was sitting.

"Yes; Mr. Skinner, the lawyer whom you met here last week," continued Mrs. Edgeworth. "He came and asked to see Cora. We both came in and I asked him what he wanted. He was so polite to us and said 'he had come to make apologies for his conduct when he was here last. 'You have already apologized for that, Mr. Skinner,' said I, 'and —'"

"Good! Good!" exclaimed Jack, "and what did the old skin say to that, ma'am?"

"He colored up and stammered that he had acted like a brute, and ought to have been well thrashed. 'I am not naturally cross, ma'am, and I did not mean what I said. I have so many tenants to look after who try to beat me out of my rent and commissions that I have to be cross to some of them when I don't feel cross. I am a bachelor and have an income of \$10,000 dollars a year, with a dozen houses and a pile of railroad stocks, all of which I will confer upon my wife when I get one. I have come down to ask your lovely daughter to be my wife and —'"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Jack, turning to Cora. "Shall I go and kill the impudent old rascal for you?"

Cora laughed.

"Oh, no. I sent him away, without so much as thanking him for the honor he proposed to me."

"Of course you did. The idea of marrying such an old reprobate. I—I will wring his nose off his face when I see him again."

"Rap, rap, rap."

"Oh, that is Evelyn Cassel!" exclaimed Cora, springing to her feet. "I know her rap," and she ran to the front door and opened it.

Sure enough it was Evelyn.

The two girls rushed into each other's arms and hugged and kissed as girls always do.

"I knew your knock, dear," Cora said. "Come in. Mr. Conway is here."

"Oh, is he? Why, Mr. Conway, I didn't dream of finding you here! I am so glad to see you," and she gave her hand to our charming hero with her usual frankness.

Jack shook her hand in a cordial, friendly way, and expressed his gratification at meeting her again.

"Mr. Hardin come with me," she said, "and as we entered the gate, we saw a man standing right under the window there. On seeing us looking at him, he made a run for the palings, and putting his hand on them, sprang lightly over into the street."

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Cora in alarm. "What can it mean? We have nothing in the world to tempt thieves."

"I got a good look at him," continued Evelyn, "and if he was not the lawyer who was here last week, then I must say I wouldn't know him in broad daylight."

"Great prophets!" exclaimed Hook and Ladder Jack, leaping to his feet, "I want to see him just one minute!" and without stopping for his hat, he darted out of the house like a rocket, and disappeared in the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER IX.

A SKINNER, ESQ., FORMS A PLOT.

The reader will doubtless remember the first meeting between Hook and Ladder Jack and Abram Skinner, the lawyer. The meeting was at the cottage of the widow Edgeworth, whither the lawyer had gone to collect the rent of the cottage for the owner, who was his client.

A few days after that meeting Lawyer Skinner was sitting in his dingy office opening his morning's mail. Among the pile of letters on his desk was one from the law firm of Grabb & Holdem, of New York City, which read as follows:

"Dear Skinner,—We are commissioned by Messrs. Hunt & Findem, solicitors, Leeds, England, to find the heirs of Chas. and Cicely Edgeworth, now in this country. Cicely Edgeworth was the daughter of Sir Thomas Marston, of Marston Hall, near Leeds. She married Charles Edgeworth, a penniless young tutor, against the wishes of her parents, and was, in consequence, disowned and disinherited by them. The young couple emigrated to America after a daughter was born to them, whose name was Cora. Messrs. Hunt & Findem say that Edgeworth died a few years ago, and soon after, so they heard, the widow followed, leaving the daughter, Cora, alone in the world.

"Sir Thomas is now dead and it turns out that all his immense estate is willed to his granddaughter, Cora Edgeworth. Hence, she is very much wanted. The latest news they have of the Edgeworths is that they had settled in 'Waterville, U. S. A.,' which is your town, of course. Now, as you have acted very acceptably with us in several cases, we desire you to institute a search for the young lady and let us know the result, charging the account to us. Hoping to hear from you soon, we remain,

"Very truly,

"Grabb & Holdem, Attorneys at Law."

"Whew!" exclaimed Abram Skinner as he read that interesting letter of the New York lawyers. "What a windfall, to be sure. And to think that I should know the mother and daughter these two or three years. Been collecting rent from them all that time, without suspecting that they were members of the English nobility. What an old, hard-headed fool I am! Well, well! To think what happened last time I was down in Meadow Lane to collect the rent. I—I must think of this. Yes, I must sleep on and think over it. Well—well! The daughter of Sir Thomas Marston, of Marston Hall, and the daughter the heiress of all the estate! Why it must be worth two or three million dollars!"

The lawyer arose, locked the door of his office and then sat down at his desk and read the letter again.

"The mother is not dead," he said to himself. "That is where Hunt & Findem have been misinformed. She is alive yet, and just in the prime of life, though in a delicate state of health. H-hum! I wonder if she would like to marry again. She had a hard time of it since marrying the poor school teacher. Maybe she would not object to a husband capable of taking care of her. Her husband could manage the estate of her daughter, and —. Ah, yes. Why not marry the daughter and own the estate. I—ahem, am not too old for the daughter. True, she is young and handsome, yet too poor to have a beau. Just now, without any situation and no income, she may grasp at any chance to secure a home for herself and mother. Yes, she would not refuse a lawyer for a husband, she being a poor shop girl. Abram Skinner, you are a cute old rat," and he rubbed his hands with gleeful satisfaction over his prospective programme. "Ha, ha, ha! You didn't think of getting married last week, you sly old rogue. She will make a beautiful wife. Maybe she will be a trifle extravagant, but then she will bring in money enough for all that. Oh, I can't be mistaken about the identity of the mother and daughter. Sir Thomas' daughter Cicely, married Charles Edgeworth. They had one child, Cora. That's what Hunt and Findem write. They came to America, and then Edgeworth dies. Now, here is a woman named Edgeworth—a widow—her name is Cicely, and she has a daughter named Cora. That is enough for me. Such coincidences of names could never happen. They are all the right ones, and A. Skinner, Esq., is not going to make any mistake about it. The greatest mistake I ever made was when I spoke sharply to Mrs. Edgeworth the other evening when that rascally man was there. That was a mistake which I must rectify at once. Oh, suppose the daughter is in love with the fireman who saved her life! What chance would I have then? None in the world. Young girls are silly about such things. She has not known him two weeks yet. He cannot have done much courting in that time. But A. Skinner, Esq., never lets any man get ahead of him. I will go dress up and call on the widow, tender my apologies; and ask the hand of her daughter in marriage."

The wily old lawyer immediately set to work on his scheme. He left his office and went to his quarters. His landlady was surprised when she saw him come in at such an unusual hour. She was still more surprised when she saw him go out an hour later, dressed in his best Sunday suit.

He called at the cottage in Meadow Lane. The reader knows the result of the visit from the lips of the mother, as she related it to Hook and Ladder Jack in the presence of Cora herself.

Foiled, defeated, he went away gnashing his teeth in a furious rage.

"She shall be mine," he hissed, "I will write to Grabb & Holdem that I have traced them to Philadelphia or some other place and then push them to the wall—starve them into my net. Such a fortune with such a wife shall not escape me."

He went back to his quarters and laid aside his Sunday suit, donned his old office garments and returned to business.

"I'll keep up with them," he muttered. "I will not let them make a move that I do not know about. I will go back again to-night and see what I can find out. Every comfort must be cut off from them that does not come from me. That's it. That's my plan."

That night he stealthily approached the latticed window of the Edgeworth cottage, and overheard the widow tell the young fireman of his visit and proposal to Cora, together with Jack Conway's remarks. He was preparing to hear more when Tom Hardin and Evelyn Cassel came along and scared him away.

CHAPTER X

MURDER! MURDER! HELP! HELP!

When Hook and Ladder Jack dashed out of the cottage to aid Tom Hardin in the attempt to catch the eavesdropping lawyer, he was just in the frame of mind to do a deed that would have changed the whole tenor of his life, had he caught up with the object of his wrath.

The old lawyer was wiry and tough, and fear lent wings to his feet. He knew that it would never do for him to be caught in such a compromising position, and so he made the best foot race he had made since his school boy days, and succeeded in getting away from his pursuer by means of the scattered lamp-posts in that vicinity.

The darkness aided him and he got away.

On his turning to go back to the cottage, Tom encountered Hook and Ladder Jack.

"Hello, Conway!"

"Hello, Hardin! Where is he?"

"Why? Do you know who it was?"

"I have my suspicions," was all that Jack would say.

They reached the house and were met at the door by the women, who were greatly excited.

"Did you see him?" Cora eagerly asked of Hook and Ladder Jack.

"No," he ran like a streak of greased lightning," was the reply.

"I am so glad!"

"Why?"

"Because I don't like so much fussing," she said. "You would have beaten him and then it would have got into the papers. All our names would have been published, and that would be disagreeable."

"So it would," said he, "but it would have been very agreeable for me to get his head under my left arm just for a moment. Oh, wouldn't I caress him?"

"Yes, I know you would," laughed Cora, "and that is why I am glad you failed to catch him. Come in now and make yourself as pleasant as you can."

She led the little party into the sitting room where they seated themselves and chatted gayly for a couple of hours.

Cora told her mother and Evelyn Cassel, just before the two young men came in, not to mention the lawyer's name in their presence. They followed her advice and the evening passed away quietly.

When Tom and Evelyn left, Jack took leave also, and went with them.

As they approached the corner where the expressman and his pal had attacked Jack and Evelyn a few evenings before, Evelyn remarked to Tom:

"This is the place where your friends waited for you the other evening."

"Yes," he replied, "I am really sorry I was not here to meet them."

"Hanged if I don't believe they are here again," said Jack, as he saw two dark forms crouching back in the shadow of the house.

Both he and Tom instantly started toward the men.

With an oath, both men sprang up and struck at them with cudgels. Jack and Tom, in anticipation of an attack, had provided themselves with heavy canes of seasoned hickory. They were therefore prepared for this demonstration. They received the cudgels on their canes, and then commenced belaboring them about their heads and shoulders.

It was too much for the ruffians.

They took to their heels and fled like frightened deer.

But they were not destined to escape without a sound thrashing.

Tom and Jack pursued them, knocked them down, and belabored them with their stout canes until they roared lustily for quarter.

"Yell louder!" cried Jack as he whipped one of them unmercifully.

"Whoop 'em up!" exclaimed Hardin as he laid it on with all his might. "Call the police and get run in!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"This is the second time I have met you fellows," said Jack, "and I am always glad to see you." Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Murder! Murder!" screamed one of the villains, believing that they were about to be beaten to death.

"Help! Help! Oh, Lord, don't kill me!"

"Oh, Mr. Hardin!" cried Evelyn, running up and catching Tom by the arm, "don't kill them. You have punished them enough. Let them go, please!"

"All right. Get up, you rascals, and run. The next time you try this, I will make worms'-meat out of your miserable carcasses. Run, I say!"

Both wretches sprang to their feet and ran, as if for dear life.

"Oh, you have almost killed them!" exclaimed Evelyn in great alarm. "I declare, it is unsafe to come out with either of you gentlemen."

"Unsafe!" and Jack laughed. "You are not hurt, are you?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Why do you say unsafe, then?"

"Because I have been scared almost to death!"

"Oh!" and both Jack and Tom laughed heartily, and in which she finally joined them.

"So you are worse scared than hurt?" said Tom.

"Yes, and that is one way of killing people, too."

"Well, I am sorry. I didn't mean to do it. Forgive me this time, and I promise you not to do it again, unless they force me to it."

"So do I," said Jack with a dry chuckle. "I am perfectly willing to be forgiven."

Evelyn laughed again in spite of herself.

"I forgive you, of course," she said, "because neither of you are to blame. Here's people coming. Please come away!"

They both turned and walked briskly away with the young lady between them, as several men ran up to inquire about the cry of murder and calls for help.

the least deter him from his purpose. He made up his mind that it was a much more pleasant thing to marry a great fortune than to work for it, hence his resolution to pay another visit to the widow's cottage that evening.

Under the window, he heard the widow telling Hook and Ladder Jack all about his visit, speaking in no complimentary terms about himself. He was gnashing his teeth in silent rage when he heard the click of the iron latch on the little front gate. Looking quickly around, he heard footsteps approaching the front door of the cottage. A moment later he made out the form of a lady and gentlemen. They halted within a few feet of the door, as if to watch him. At last the gentleman approached. An indefinable fear took possession of him. He made a break for the fence, which he cleared at a single bound by placing his hands on the top and springing over.

"Halt!" cried Tom Hardin, for it was he who had come with pretty Evelyn Cassel.

The demand had the effect of only making him run faster. He had no idea of halting at any man's demand at that moment.

"Stop!" cried Tom, dashing after him, or I will fire!"

"My God!" groaned the fleeing lawyer. "I shall be shot in the back."

But that fear lent wings to his feet. He fairly flew down the street, and in less than one minute he was out of Tom Hardin's sight.

Evelyn, at the time she saw Tom Hardin start in pursuit, vaulting over the fence at the same spot where Skinner did, knocked excitedly on the door of the cottage and was admitted.

The moment he was sure he was safe, the rascally lawyer stopped to get his wind.

He was blowing like a porpoise.

He sat down on the curbstone and mopped the perspiration from his brow.

The reaction had come, and he was scarcely able to walk.

Some ten or fifteen minutes later, he arose to his feet and staggered to the next street and turned in the direction of the street in which his office stood.

It was at least a mile to his office. Something prompted him to go there before going home to his bachelor apartments at Mrs. Sandford's.

With an eagerness born of a love for money, he entered his office and struck a light. He drew the letter from Grabb & Holdem in reference to the Edgeworths from his pocket, and carefully read it over, word for word, again.

He leaned back in his heavy, old, wooden arm-chair and gave way to a train of thought.

An hour passed and still he sat there and mused until he grew drowsy. Almost unconsciously he dozed off to sleep, and then passed quickly into the land of dreams.

He dreamed that he was married to the beautiful heiress of Marston Hall, and was the master of the immense estate of her ancestors. Liveried servants waited on his beck and call, and even the nobility of England did him reverence. How long he slept, he knew not. A stifling sensation awoke him. He sprang to his feet and found the room full of smoke, which poured in through the transom over the door.

He gasped, coughed, sneezed, and then wildly shrieked: "Fire! Fire!"

He had the presence of mind to seize a few papers that were lying on his desk, cram them into his pockets and break for the door.

Rushing along the corridor toward the head of the stairs, he found a stream of flames rushing up and reaching their fiery tongues after him.

Shrieking with all his might, he ran up another flight of stairs. The dense smoke followed him. He fell on the floor,

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAWYER'S ESCAPE AND DREAM.

Abram Skinner, Esq., lawyer, was a man of very great pertinacity. The rejection of his suit by the fair Cora, did not in

and recovered somewhat. Smoke never settles close down on the floor, so he was saved from suffocation by this fall.

At last he ran to one of the windows at one end of the corridor and looked out. The street was full of people and the fire engines were playing upon the doomed building.

"Save me! Save me!" he shrieked frantically.

Everybody knew that no families lived in the building, and had not suspected that any one was in it until that moment. Then the most intense excitement prevailed.

"There is a man up there!" the crowd shouted. "Save him! Run up the ladder and save him!"

There had been no need of the ladders up to that moment. The hook and ladder men had looked on at the work of the firemen, holding themselves in readiness to aid them in any way they might be needed.

But the cry for help startled them.

"Up with the ladder!" sang out Hook and Ladder Jack, and in less than two minutes the tall ladders were moving upward toward the window.

Jack sprang up the ladder the moment it touched the wall. As his wellknown form ascended, a cry went up from the vast crowd below.

"There goes Hook and Ladder Jack! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Up, up he went, the shrill shrieks of the terror-stricken lawyer ringing in his ears all the way.

When he reached the window, he found no one there.

The flames were too hot for the lawyer. The draught made by the window drew the heat. Having saved himself by running up one flight of stairs, he concluded to ascend another, and he ran shrieking along the corridor, just as Jack appeared at the window.

"Good Lord!" gasped Jack. "Why didn't the fool stay there? Now, it is a bad chance for both of us."

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE JAWS OF DEATH.

Without stopping to count the odds, Hook and Ladder Jack climbed in through the window and ran along the corridor, calling out:

"Here! Here! Here is the ladder! Come here!"

But the frantic lawyer ran shrieking up the other flight of stairs.

"Gone up higher!" exclaimed Jack, darting forward and striking the stairs. He went up three or four paces at a time, and reached the top landing just a few paces behind him.

"Here's help!" he cried.

"Save me! Save me!" cried Skinner in frantic accents, turning and rushing into his arms.

Jack seized him in his grasp and turned to descend the stairs with him.

Too late!

The flames came roaring up the stairs and fairly hissed defiance at him who had so often defied them. They roared, hissed and crackled around him, and for a moment he stood irresolute and undecided what to do. He knew that the ladders would not reach above the window at which he had entered the building, and that it was on the floor below.

"Save me! Save me!" cried Skinner as he gasped, half suffocated in the dense smoke that came from the floors below.

"I will! I will!" cried Jack. "Keep quiet, old man. Where is the scuttle in the roof?"

"Save me! Save me!" was all the terror-stricken man could say.

Jack turned and ran toward a little narrow stairway that led

to the roof. Up that he ascended, carrying the shrieking Skinner with him.

At the top he discovered a little ladder that led up to the scuttle, and in a moment he had opened the scuttle. That created a strong draught, and a dense volume of smoke shot past him as though it were the funnel of some immense smelting furnace. There was no time to be lost.

"Save me! Save me!" screamed Skinner, and the next moment Jack tossed him through the scuttle out on the flat roof as though he were but a bundle of goods that he had saved.

He scrambled through after him and then closed the scuttle to stop the draught.

When he turned to look at the man he had saved, he found a dozen letters and papers lying on the roof around him. He stooped, picked them up, and hastily crammed some of them into the lawyer's pocket, seized the half-insensible man in his arms and rushed to the edge of the roof.

Since he had entered the window, the firemen and the crowd had seen nothing of him. A general feeling of uneasiness as to his fate spread among them.

Suddenly a joyful cry of:

"There he is! There he is on the roof! Hurrah! Hurrah for Hook and Ladder Jack!"

Jack waved his trumpet above his head for silence.

A silence like the stillness of death fell upon the vast throng of people. They wanted to hear the orders of the daring hero who seemed to defy the flames like the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace.

"The ladders are too short!" came from the silver trumpet. "Throw a rope!"

Then the wild cheers burst from the crowd again.

But the brave boys of Hook and Ladder No. 1 were working with a will. As their ladders would not reach to their beloved foreman, they took a rocket, tied a twine to the stick, with a rope to the twine, and set it off.

Swash-sh-sh! went the rocket in the air, up through the cloud of sparks, smoke and cinders, with the long twine streaming behind it.

As the twine fell across the roof, the crowd yelled itself hoarse.

Jack dropped his man, seized the twine, and commenced pulling hand-over-hand.

The rope climbed up the wall of heated brick. Every one held his breath as it went up, half expecting a fiery tongue of flame to dart from one of the windows and cut it in two. But it passed up and another wild cheer announced that Jack had the rope in his hands.

He drew it up and tied one end around the body of the lawyer, whose face during all the time he failed to recognize, and then pushed it over the roof.

How men and women trembled as they saw the body of the man dangling in the air so high above ground, with fiery tongues of flame reaching out of every window after him.

How they cheered as he quickly descended, was received in the arms of firemen below! He was unconscious. All his hair was singed off, but he was alive and only unconscious.

"Come down, Jack!" yelled everybody in that vast throng. Women and weak men became so excited that they shed tears and cried like babies.

Jack pulled up the rope again, and tied one end to the flag-pole in the center, and let himself down over the roof.

Down, down, he went, passing window after window, whence fiery red tongues darted after him! Down along the heated wall that seemed to waver, as if it was about to fall and crush him.

Suddenly there was a wild cry.

The flames had cut the rope!

CHAPTER XIII.

JACK IN PERIL, BUT COMES OUT SAFELY—HE SAVES OLD SKINNER.

In the great throng of people who watched the descent of Hook and Ladder Jack from the burning building by means of the rope by which he had let the rascally lawyer down to the ground, there was perhaps not one who did not tremble for his safety.

They watched every movement of his with breathless interest.

They knew that the chances of escape were heavily against him.

Great, fiery tongues of flame shot forth from every window, as if eager to lap him in their fiery folds.

Silence like that of a tomb prevailed, save that of the roaring of the flames, the hissing steam as the water fell into the red furnace, and the working of the engines. Every man held his breath as he gazed, as though his own strength depended upon that of the fireman.

"Look! Look!" burst from a thousand throats at once. "Oh, he is lost! The rope is on fire! Poor Jack! In God's name catch him as he falls!"

The rope caught fire in a tongue of flame that twisted around four or five feet to the left, as if controlled by an intelligent demon of destruction.

Jack heard the wild cries of the multitude. He instinctively knew that the flames had caught the rope. It was the only danger he feared. He looked up and saw the little flame that hugged and climbed up the rope like a serpent. Then he looked down and saw that the ladder was three feet to his right and many feet below. With a desperate resolve, he struck his right foot against the side of one of the windows, and thus pushed himself directly over the ladder as the burning rope burst in twain.

A cry of horror went up.

Men and women shut their eyes that they might not see what was taking place.

Hundreds clapped their hands against their ears to shut out the thud they knew would follow.

But the thud never came.

He fell about twenty feet and caught on the ladder.

The surprise was so great that he had run more than half way down the ladder, ere the people could recover from it.

Then a grand shout went up that drowned the roar of the flames.

"Hurrah for Hook and Ladder Jack!"

The name was echoed to the skies. The police tried in vain to keep back the crowd. A grand rush was made for the daring young hero, and again he was carried off on the shoulders of his admirers.

"Let me down, boys," he said, after they had carried him around the block. "I must be at my post you know."

"Yes, let him down," said Bob Kramer, the assistant foreman of the Hook and Ladder company. "We want him."

They let him go and he returned to his post. The company labored until daylight pulling down the walls they thought were too dangerous to be left standing.

A little after sunrise, Tom Hardin came by on his way to work, and grasped Jack's hand, saying:

"You have done it again, Jack, but the old rascal was not worth saving."

"Who was he, Tom?"

"Why, didn't you know him, Jack?"

"No—I didn't look to see who it was. It was awful hot up there, Tom."

"Well, it was old Skinner, the lawyer," said Tom.

"Great tar-box!" exclaimed Jack, in unfeigned surprise.

"Yes. The morning papers are full of it. He had all the hair singed off his head."

Jack gave a long whistle and looked Tom straight in the face. Tom turned his stare, and then both of them burst into a hearty laugh.

"I only wish I had recognized him," laughed Jack.

"What would you have done, if you had?" Tom asked.

"Well, I would have given him a bit of a lecture," replied Jack, "and maybe I would have added a little more to the scare. All right. I have got that much the advantage of him, anyhow. He was the worst scared man I ever saw. I had to catch and hold him. Hanged if he didn't faint like a woman and get as limber as a wet rag. Where is he?"

"His address is in the paper her," replied Tom, giving him a paper with a graphic account of the fire and rescue.

Jack took the paper, put it in his pocket and turned to his post again. Tom Hardin went on his way to his work, and soon after the hook and ladder company returned to its quarters.

"Your coat is ruined, Jack," said Bob Kramer, assistant foreman of the company, as he discovered nearly a dozen places on the round-about coat of the young fireman where the flames had kissed too familiarly.

"Is that so?"

"Yes, Bob, you had better hang it up in your quarters when you go to the station house, and keep it as a memento of the greatest peril of your life."

"By George, Bob!" exclaimed Jack, "I believe I will do it, for it was the closest call I ever had. I thought you fellows would smell my roast meat at one time."

Bob laughed, and Jack took off the coat and looked at it. Bob had spoken truly. The coat was irretrievably ruined, the fire having scorched it in a dozen places so badly as to render it utterly too useless for further wear. Accordingly, he hung it up in the closet of his boarding house when he returned to breakfast.

"Had I known it was the old rascal of a lawyer," said Jack to himself, as he changed his clothes before going down to breakfast, "I would have made him promise to let Cora and her mother alone, under penalty of being thrown into the fire. He would have promised anything then, for he was the worst scared old man I ever saw. He thinks that because he has money and is a lawyer that any girl would jump at him for a husband. Cora is a real live girl, who would not have such an old stick for a husband, if she ever got married. If he fools around her any longer, I will just mash his nose for him. That's what I will do."

Jack was already in love with pretty Cora and the thought that another man wanted to marry her made him quite savage.

"Oh, Mr. Conway," exclaimed his landlady, a widow with two marriageable daughters—as he sat down to the breakfast table, "I declare you have gone and extinguished yourself again! The papers is full of your brave explosions last night!"

"Indeed, ma'am," said he, almost choking himself in an effort to suppress an "explosion" at her wonderful misapplication of words and terms, "I am glad the papers have got something to write about."

"Something to write about!" exclaimed Mrs. Rattler. "Why, lan' sakes alive, man! Ain't you allus saving some poor body or other from the flames? What else should they write about, to be sure?"

"Well, they might write something about Mrs. Rattler and her excellent boarding house," suggested Jack, helping himself to a beefsteak. "A word or two about the handsome widow, might bring in another husband, you know."

Mrs. Rattler blushed like a school girl and hid herself mod-

estly behind the fly-brush, whilst a wink went around the table from boarder to boarder.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH SKINNER DECLINES TO BE GRATEFUL—HIS LANDLADY'S MISTAKE.

When he was received in the arms of the firemen, Lawyer Skinner was too far gone to see what was going on around him. He was mumbling, groaning, and acting like a man entirely bereft of his senses.

"Who is he?"

"Who knows him?"

"Where does he live?" were questions that passed from mouth to mouth of firemen and policemen.

Fortunately, a man who had an office in the building, recognized him, and told them where he lived.

He was carried in an ambulance to Mrs. Sandford's boarding house, where he was put to bed and a physician sent for. He was still groaning, and begging somebody to come and save him.

"He seems to be wandering in his mind," said the doctor. "The shock has unsettled him. I must examine his injuries."

He found nearly all the hair burnt off his head, aside from that, his clothes had received far more damage. The physician could find no more burns or bruises save a redness around his chest and arms, caused by the rope that Jack had tied there to let him down from the burning building.

Under the circumstances, the doctor wisely declined to administer a powerful opiate and let him sleep off the excitement that had upset his mental faculties.

The result showed the wisdom of his prescription, for the lawyer slept till noon and woke up clothed in his right mind.

He gazed around the room in which he had lived a quarter of a century, and asked:

"How long have I been here?"

"You were brought home a little after midnight, Mr. Skinner," said Mrs. Sandford, his landlady. "You are better now?"

He glared at her for a moment or two, and then asked:

"Have I been very ill?"

"No, sir, but you have been very wild, sir. You didn't know anything at all, sir, when they brought you home."

"How could I know anything when I was roasted brown? I tell you, I was cooked brown, Mrs. Sandford. I actually smelt my flesh cooking as you would smell a rib roast in your oven. Good Lord! My hair is all burned away!" and a look of dismay came over him as he ran his hand over his head and got an idea of the damage that had been done.

"You ought to be thankful that you were not cooked to death, Mr. Skinner," Mrs. Sandford remarked, "and Lord knows you would have been if Hook and Ladder Jack had not run right into the fire and carried you out."

"What's that, madam? What is that you say?"

"Hook and Ladder Jack took you out of the burning building, and ——"

"He did no such thing, madam! Don't repeat that ridiculous story, madam! I climbed out of the window myself, and ——"

"Oh, Mr. Skinner!" exclaimed the widow, holding up both hands. "You were so far gone that you don't know anything at all about it. Just read that, and see what Hook and Ladder Jack did for you," and she handed him the paper.

He seized the paper, sat bolt upright in bed, his singed head giving him a decidedly comical appearance, and eagerly devoured the contents. It was easy for him to recollect enough

to assure him that the newspaper account of the fire was, in the main, correct.

With a groan, he fell back on the bed.

"Shall I bring you your breakfast, Mr. Skinner?" the landlady asked. "I know you must be ever so hungry."

"Yes—yes, leave me!" he replied in a growling tone.

Mrs. Sandford went down to the kitchen to see about getting up a breakfast for him at that late hour.

"Out on him!" hissed the old lawyer, the moment he was alone. "He will be more impudent now, than ever. He will want gratitude from me, and I suppose I will have to manifest some, for the sake of public opinion. Yes, yes. I must make a show of gratitude, but he must not presume upon it. No, no. He must keep out of my way, or it may be the worse for him. He must not cross my path, or I shall have him removed. No man must come between me and my prize. Half the young women in the town are talking about that fellow this morning, and many of them would fall in love with him if they got the chance. He must keep away from Cora Edgeworth and her mother, or I will see that one or the other is removed. I am almost ruined by this fire. My papers and books outside the iron safe must be destroyed. Lord! How near I came to being roasted alive myself. I suppose I ought to be thankful to him, but I don't want to be. He treated me brutally that day we met down in Meadow Lane. I have never forgiven him and I never will. It was his duty to save me or any one else he found in the building. That is what firemen are for—to save life and property."

"Mr. Skinner," said Mrs. Sandford, coming in with a tray in her hands, "here's a nice hot breakfast for you."

"Thank you, ma'am. Just set it on the table there and I will get up."

She put the tray on the table and hastened out of the room. He arose from the bed, bathed his face and hands, and took a look at himself in the mirror.

"Goodness!" he exclaimed. "I shall have to buy a wig to wear until my hair grows out again," and the thought of the expense actually made him groan out again. Expense never failed to pain him almost as much as the pains that flesh is heir to did. "Yes, I will have to buy a wig. It will not do for me to go before Mrs. Edgeworth and her daughter, looking this way. No matter. A wig will make me look younger."

Feeling very hungry, he set to, and made havoc with the breakfast his landlady had brought up to him. The shock had evidently not reached his appetite, for it was very robust to say the least.

When he was through eating his breakfast, he rang for Mrs. Sandford, or the maid of all work. The latter appeared.

"Peggy," he said to the girl, "tell Mrs. Sandford to come here."

"Yes, sir," replied the girl, running back down stairs to tell her mistress that Mr. Skinner was as bald as a pumpkin, and calling her.

Of course, the landlady responded promptly in person.

"Mrs. Sandford," he said, as she came to his door, "you are a woman of good taste and judgment."

She simpered and smiled, picked a hole in the corner of her apron, and replied:

"Lawks, Mr. Skinner! That is just what I was saying to my daughter, Miss Betsy, about you, sir."

"Thunder! I ain't a woman!"

"Lawks, sir, I didn't say as how you was. I always said you were a proper sort of man, sir, and ——"

"Oh, you did, eh? Well, you did just exactly right. Now, I know you to be a woman of good judgment and taste, and so I have sent for you to be my ——"

"Lawks, sir! It is so sudden like!" and she threw up both her hands, rolling her eyes and trying to blush like a school

girl. "I never thought as I would marry again before Betsy and Melinda were settled, but —"

"What in heaven's name are you talking about, woman?" gasped the amazed lawyer. "I wanted to ask you to be so kind to tell me if you think I ought to buy a wig!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAWYER'S FIRST DEFEAT.

On hearing the unmatrimonial word "wig" fall from the lawyer's lips, the widow Sandford uttered a scream and ran from the room.

After such a mistake she could no longer face him. She would die first.

Skinner was as much astonished as she was.

"Marry, indeed!" he muttered. "The idea! She would have to be very rich, indeed. Marriage is a matter of business with me. I am not silly enough to take a woman and support her all the rest of my life just for the sake of having a wife. Oh, no. My wife must have more than enough to pay for her own keeping. She must put enough into the firm to pay for the use of the name at the head of the firm. That's my matrimonial platform. The estate of Marston Hall will do that and more. Its fair mistress will have a title. She is one of the nobility of England. Ah! That is enough to make a man peril his soul for. I would risk my neck to win it. Therefore Jack Conway must get out of my way if he wishes to live as long as I have."

He paced the floor for several minutes, now and then taking a look at himself in the mirror.

"Confound it!" he growled, rubbing his singed scalp with his hand, "I must get a wig. I believe that rascally Conway stuck my head in the flames on purpose to make me bald-headed. Ha, ha, ha! She thought I meant to ask her to be my wife, eh? Oh, the widows! Hanged if I don't think Cora's mother would have jumped at my offer. She has been married once and knows what a husband is. But she is not the heir, though her daughter will undoubtedly make her a liberal allowance."

He talked on at random, showing how much his mind was engrossed with this scheme of capturing the fair Cora and her fortune.

Sadly surveying his bald pate in the mirror, again he made up his mind to get a wig. He rang the bell, and the same servant girl appeared in response.

"Peggy," he said, "is little Billy in the house?"

"No, sir. He is in the back yard."

"Send him up here, please. I want to get him to run an errand for me."

"Yes, sir," replied Peggy, laughing in her sleeve at the comical appearance of his head, going down stairs at a rate that enabled her to get out of hearing before she exploded, which she did the moment she reached the kitchen.

Little Willie was the widow's youngest son. He was a boy twelve years of age, and the special aversion of A. Skinner, Esq. There was no love lost between them, for the reason that the mother, through motives of policy, had often trounced him on complaint of the ancient boarder. The reader, therefore, may judge of Willie's surprise when Peggy told him that Mr. Skinner wanted to see him right away.

"What are yer giving us, Peg?" he replied.

"Straight, Billy," she said, looking him straight in the face. "He asked me to tell you to run up there, as if he wanted you to run an errand for him. There now."

Peggy had always been his friend in his battles with the boarders, many of whom insisted that he ought to be killed in the speediest manner possible. Though she had played

many a practical joke upon him, he had always forgiven her—if he couldn't get square any other way.

Without another word, he rammed his dirty fists into his trouser pockets, and wended his way up stairs to the room door of his ancient enemy.

He rapped in a half hesitating manner.

Skinner opened it.

Billy glared at him in profound amazement. He had been told that the lawyer had been brought home last night badly burned. But he had not heard of the loss of his hair, hence his stare. It was not unmixed with some of his native impudence.

"Billy," said the singed limb of the law, "I want you to run an errand for me, for which I will pay you handsomely."

"Who's you?" Billy asked.

"Who's me! Why, I am Skinner, you imp. Who else can I be, I'd like to know?"

"Nixey, cully," said Billy in a very positive tone of voice. "I know the ole bloke. He's got some hair on his old thinker, an' yer ain't. Say, why don't you put guano on yer head to make the bristles grow? Yer could beat all the other hogs raisin' them."

"Great temple of Solomon!" groaned the lawyer. "Did you ever hear such impudence! I am Mr. Skinner, you young rascal, and I want you to know it. You never knew him to tell a lie. I want you to —"

"Soy! Do you know the ole bloke?"

"What ole bloke?"

"Ole Skinner—the man what skins everybody what does business with him."

Skinner ground his teeth in impotent rage and answered:

"Yes, I know him well enough. So do you. You will know him better within an hour."

"Did yer ever hear him tell the truth right out straight, mister? Honor bright, now?"

"Yes, you son of darkness."

"And it didn't choke him? Didn't it make him sick or nuthin'?"

"No!" hissed the lawyer, determined to see how far the young hornet would go.

"Lordy, what a whopper!" exclaimed Billy in well feigned surprise.

"Mrs. Sandford! Mrs. Sandford!" yelled the old lawyer rushing out into the hall in a towering rage.

Mrs. Sanford heard him, but would not respond. Her mistake of half an hour before had upset her too much. She sent Peggy to see what was wanted.

"No, no, Mrs. Sandford!" exclaimed Skinner, foaming at the mouth. "I want the mother of this devil's imp! I will have the hide thrashed off his back or leave the house! Yes, I will leave the house! Leave the house!"

"Mr. Skinner!" called out Mrs. Sandford from the landing below, "please leave my house, sir. I want your room for a more quiet party."

There were half a dozen doors of as many rooms ajar, and half a dozen lady boarders were taking in the whole scene. Each of them heard the ancient limb of the law catch his breath as the landlady's words struck his ears.

Billy clapped his hands to his sides and imitated a chanticleer:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo-o-o!" in a prolonged, triumphant crow, and then bounded down the stairs, clearing half a dozen steps at a bound.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALL ABOUT A WIG—CORA EDGEWORTH ENTRAPPED.

Words fail in attempting to describe the amazement of A. Skinner, Esq., when he heard Mrs. Sandford tell him to leave

the house. He had boarded there for many years, and on account of his age, profession and wealth, was regarded as the most favored boarder in the house. The widow had long cherished the hope that she might succeed in securing him as a successor to the late lamented Sandford. The idea was uppermost in her mind when she made that unfortunate mistake, which was the cause of it, in fact.

After that she felt that she could never look him in the face again. The quarrel with Billy gave her an excuse to request him to leave the house—of which she very promptly availed herself.

Skinner went back into his room and dropped into a chair, too much dumbfounded to speak. He glared around the room as if he was in a dreamy frame of mind. He was stunned, so to speak, and knew not what to do, and at the end of half an hour had worked himself into a passion again.

Resolutely putting on his hat and coat, he marched down stairs to the front door, and made direct for the barber, who had shaved him three times a week for ten years past. Then he took a seat in the chair, and said to the barber:

"Joseph, I want a shave and a wig."

"Yes—sir—you need a wig. I will send you a wig-maker. That was a narrow escape you had last night, sir."

"I think so. I never had my head in such a hot place before, and I hope I never will again."

"Indeed, sir. I should say so. Were you hurt otherwise?"

"Oh, no! Only lost my hair."

"It was a narrow escape. Mr. Conway says that it was the closest call he ever had, and you know he has been in some pretty hot places, sir."

"Yes," dryly remarked Skinner, determined not to utter any compliment to the daring young fireman.

He was shaved, and then a wigmaker came with a number of wigs, and fitted one to his singed head that so closely resembled the hair that he had lost that one would never have noticed any change.

He paid for the shave and wig, and then went to a hotel—a cheap one—and engaged room and board. Then he went back to Mrs. Sandford's and began packing up his effects.

Whilst engaged in that very unpleasant duty, a reporter for one of the city papers called upon him. He was shown up by Peggy.

The reporter wanted to interview him. Skinner was always courteous to the press. He was afraid of the reporters, and in order to keep them from ridiculing him, he always treated them kindly.

"Ah, Mr. Pen," he exclaimed, grasping the reporter's hand. "Glad to see you. How have you been? Well, I hope."

"Oh, yes. Very well. I saw your wonderful escape from that burning building last night, Mr. Skinner, and have called to get your version of the conflagration. In the first place tell me what you think of Hook and Ladder Jack? The city is ringing with his praises."

Lawyer Skinner was no fool. He knew the power of public opinion, and always bowed to it in public, no matter what his private opinions may have been.

"Mr. Conway is a hero, sir," he said. "A hero in every sense of the word, of whom our citizens ought to be proud. I am thinking of presenting him with a testimonial that will fully express my sentiments toward him for his wonderful performance last night."

He said many other things, but the reader has only interest in what he said about the man to whom he was indebted for his life. The reporter went away and the lawyer resumed his work of packing up his effects.

The next day his remarks about Hook and Ladder Jack were published in the papers and people admired him for his tribute to the daring hero.

Evelyn Cassel read them with the greatest astonishment.

She had such a bad opinion of the wily old lawyer that it was difficult for her to believe him capable of having any gratitude whatever. She took the paper down to the Edgeworths and read it for them.

"What else could he say?" Cora asked. "Mr. Conway saved his life at the risk of his own, so he can't help feeling grateful to him."

"But the old hypocrite isn't one bit grateful," said Evelyn. "He just said that because he knew he ought to say something nice about Jack."

Mrs. Edgeworth and Cora, however, believed that the better side of the lawyer had been touched, and that he was really ready to forgive Jack for his rough handling of him.

Evelyn was not convinced, however, and returned home under the impression that old Skinner hated Jack worse than ever because people praised him more.

A week passed and Hook and Ladder Jack paid another visit to the Edgeworth cottage. Cora received him with her sweetest smiles, and they sat in the little sitting room talking for two hours. Both were interested and did not notice the flight of time.

A few evenings later, as the mother and daughter were engaged in their household duties, a carriage drove up before the cottage and a woman alighted from it.

She hastened to the door and used the knocker with considerable vigor.

Cora hastened to respond.

"Are you Miss Cora Edgeworth?" the woman asked.

"Yes, that is my name."

The woman handed her a note, saying not a word.

"Who is it from?" Cora asked.

"Doctor Danforth," was the reply.

"Come in till I read it," and Cora led the way into the little sitting room.

Motioning the stranger to a seat, she hastily opened it and read:

"Waterville Hospital, Oct. 18, 18—.

"Miss Cora Edgeworth:—

"Miss Cassel was brought to this hospital two hours since, raving mad with a shock. She does nothing but call for you. It may be that if you are an intimate friend of hers, your presence will have a beneficial effect upon her. I take the liberty of sending the matron of this hospital for you, hoping that you will find it your duty to come and render such assistance as you can.

"Very respectfully,

"J. Danforth, M. D., Surgeon in Charge."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Cora, pale as death. "Of course, I will go. Mother! mother!"

Mrs. Edgeworth came running into the room greatly excited. Cora gave her the note to read and hastened to dress herself for the visit to the hospital.

She was ready in a very few minutes.

"I am ready now!" she exclaimed, running into the room and kissing her mother. "I will come back just as soon as I can, mother."

The woman led the way out to the carriage and assisted Cora into it. Then she seated herself by her side. The door was closed and the carriage rolled rapidly away from the cottage.

But ere they had gone two blocks, the woman clapped a handkerchief, saturated with some deadly drug, to Cora's face, and almost in an instant she became unconscious.

CHAPTER XVII.

CORA EDGEWORTH ABDUCTED.

The next morning after Cora had been sent for to go to the Waterville Hospital, to see Evelyn Cassel, Mrs. Edgeworth discovered that her daughter had not returned.

"Poor Evelyn," she murmured to herself, "she must indeed be in a bad way if Cora had to spend the night with her in the hospital. I wonder what could have happened to her to completely throw her out of her head?"

The anxious mother proceeded to cook breakfast for herself and Cora, expecting the latter to come in every minute, tired, hungry and sleepy. But hours passed, and still no word came from the hospital, and Mrs. Edgeworth began to think that Evelyn Cassel must be so near to death's door, that Cora dare not leave her side.

"But why does she not send me word to relieve my suspense," she asked herself a dozen times during the morning. "Poor child! She has no money to hire a messenger boy, not even to buy a postage stamp. Oh, this is horrible. We have nothing but poverty and want before us in the future. It would be far better for both of us if we were side by side in our grave."

The fond mother's memory went back to the home of her proud ancestors, contrasting her present life to what it might have been had she not followed the dictates of her heart and married the only man she ever loved.

Noon came and the mother's heart grew heavy with suspense. She was almost on the point of shutting up the house and going on foot to see about it, when a knock on the front door startled her. She knew that it was not Cora, because she had a key, but it might be a messenger from the hospital. She hastened to open the door.

Oh, horror of horrors!

Mrs. Edgeworth uttered a scream and staggered back as if she were about to fall.

There stood Evelyn Cassel as well and sane as she ever was.

"Why, dear Mrs. Edgeworth," cried Evelyn, darting forward and encircling her waist with both arms, "what's the matter? Cora! Cora! Come here quick!"

Mrs. Edgeworth gasped and struggled as if in the grasp of a demon who was trying to choke the life out of her. Evelyn, in the greatest alarm, screamed for Cora.

But in a minute or two Mrs. Edgeworth recovered sufficiently to look Evelyn in the face, and ask:

"Have you seen Cora?"

"No—not since I was here last."

"Have you been ill in the hospital?"

"Mercy on me—no!"

Mrs. Edgeworth gave a groan and sank down in a death-like swoon.

Then Evelyn screamed for Cora again, calling as loudly as she could.

But Cora came not.

Evelyn Cassel was a girl of remarkable nerve as the reader has already seen.

She laid the widow gently on the carpet and ran to all the other rooms of the house in search for Cora. Of course, she failed to find her, and she hastened back to Mrs. Edgeworth.

"What in the world does it mean?" she asked herself a dozen times in almost as many seconds.

She had the presence of mind, however, to dash a glass of cold water in the unconscious woman's face, which had the effect of shocking her into unconsciousness again.

She opened her eyes and gave a piteous scream that went straight to Evelyn's heart.

"Oh, dear Mrs. Edgeworth," she cried, "what is the matter?"

"Cora! Cora!" is all her heartbroken mother could say.

"Cora? Why what is the matter with Cora? Where is she? For Heaven's sake tell me, Mrs. Edgeworth."

"She has gone away—oh—oh!"

"Gone away. What do you mean? Has she eloped?" and Evelyn's earnestness and energetic manner served to render the poor widow more coherent.

"A woman came here in a carriage last night," she said,

as Evelyn assisted her to a seat in a chair, "and gave Cora a letter from Dr. Danforth of the Waterville Hospital, saying that you were there, raving mad, and calling for her all the time."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Evelyn, thunderstruck at the story. "Let me see the letter please."

Mrs. Edgeworth pointed to the letter on the center table. Evelyn snatched it up and eagerly read its contents.

"Oh, it is a trap by somebody to get Cora in his power," she exclaimed. "Dr. Danforth did not write that letter as it is not true, as you know, for I am here and as well as I ever was."

"Oh, my poor Cora! My poor child!" sobbed the mother.

"Don't grieve so, dear Mrs. Edgeworth," cried Evelyn, "we can soon trace her up. There are too many detectives in these days for anybody to be carried away without being found out. I will take this letter and go to the hospital with it. Be of good heart. If Cora has been carried away into a snare we can soon find out. You don't know how many friends you have, Mrs. Edgeworth. Jack Conway will hunt the world over until he finds her. There, don't cry any more. Just wait until I come back from the hospital, and I will bring you some news, perhaps. I will not leave you then, but will stay with you until Cora comes back," and the brave-hearted girl took the letter and left the house to go to the hospital with it.

At the hospital she showed the letter to Dr. Danforth, the head surgeon. He was astounded, and pronounced it a rank forgery.

"The young lady has evidently been led into a snare of some kind," he said, "and I would advise you to see the chief of police about it at once."

Cora left the letter with the doctor to prosecute the forger if he was ever caught, and proceeded at once to the great mill where Jack Conway was engineer.

She called for him, and he was sent for by the young clerk in the office.

Jack came promptly.

"Oh, Mr. Conway!" she exclaimed in a low tone of voice, as she laid her hand in his, "Cora has been abducted!"

"What?" he exclaimed.

She told him the story as the reader has it.

He turned deathly pale and his voice grew husky.

She knew that he loved the gentle Cora then, and felt that she would find a friend who would never give up the search for her dear friend Cora.

"I come to you for advice," Mr. Conway, she said, after telling him the story, "for they have few friends and no money."

"I have a little money," said Jack, "and every cent shall go if necessary, to find out about this and punish the rascals. Wait, I will go with you." He turned to the young clerk and asked for the superintendent. That official came forward, and to him the engineer asked for leave of absence, which was readily granted as the assistant engineer was fully competent to do his work.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOOK AND LADDER JACK IN A NEW ROLE.

Jack turned and left the great mills with Evelyn Cassel, the true and constant friend of Cora Edgeworth.

"What do you think about it, Mr. Conway?" Evelyn asked as they went out on the street together.

"Think about it? Why that she has been abducted, of course," he replied.

"Who could have done it, I wonder?"

"Ah! That is what we are going to try and find out. We must go and quiet her mother. Poor soul! She must be in a terrible state of anxiety."

"She is. I left her only an hour ago. I am going to stay with her until Cora comes back, or she will die of grief."

"Evelyn Cassel, you are a brave, good girl," said Jack, "a true friend, God bless you."

"Cora would do anything for me, I am sure," she replied.

"Yes, she would. She is like yourself, a true-hearted girl."

They soon reached the Edgeworth cottage and found Mrs. Edgeworth overwhelmed with grief.

"Here is Mr. Conway, Mrs. Edgeworth," said Evelyn, as they entered the house. "He saved Cora once and he will save her again."

"Oh, my poor child, my poor child!" moaned the half-crazed mother, wringing her hands. "Oh, my darling, where are you—where are you?"

Honest Jack was unmanned for a moment and turned aside to choke down a sob and brush away a tear.

Evelyn threw her arms around the widow's neck and said:

"Don't cry dear. She will come back. Hook and Ladder Jack is strong and brave. Tom Hardin, too, will join him in the search as soon as he hears about it."

"Yes, ma'am," said Jack, turning and grasping the mother's hand in his. "I will never go to work in the mills again until I see your daughter restored to your arms."

"Oh, thank you—thank you, sir," and the tears came afresh. "I will wait and trust in God. Oh, my child, my poor child!"

"I will go and see Tom about it," said Jack to Evelyn, turning and leaving the house very abruptly.

He went to the great jewelry manufactory where Hardin was at work and asked to be allowed to see him. Tom was sent for, and the two friends met in the office of the factory.

Jack told him what had happened, and the news staggered the brave fellow. He at once left work and went out with the daring fireman.

They consulted about it and decided to go to the chief of police and ask for assistance.

They did so.

To their great surprise, the chief, after hearing their story, treated it but lightly, and said:

"She will come back in a few days. Girls often go on such larks, and always come back wiser than when they went away."

"Do you mean to say that you think that she went away voluntarily?" Conway asked.

"Of course she did. But whether or not she went to where she was led to believe she was going, is another question. The note purporting to come from Dr. Danforth was a dodge, of course, to deceive either her or her mother."

"Yes."

"Well, it may be that she was the deceived one, and in this instance, you will hear from her after awhile."

"You won't put any detectives to work on the case, then?"

"Not to-day at any rate."

"Very well, sir," said Jack. "Remember that I called for assistance and failed to get it. Come on, Tom. We are as good detectives as any on the force."

They turned and left the police station together and went toward the hospital.

"I want to see that letter," said Jack.

Dr. Danforth knew Hook and Ladder Jack well and he gave him the letter to examine.

The daring young fireman read it over very carefully, and then closely examined the handwriting.

"I can't make anything out of it," he said, handing it to Hardin.

"Nor can I," remarked the doctor. "I cannot recognize the handwriting as belonging to any one I know."

Tom Hardin read the note slowly and handed it back to the doctor with a shake of his head.

"I give it up," he remarked.

"Is it an attempt to imitate your handwriting, doctor?" asked Jack.

"Oh, no. It is nothing like my handwriting."

"What are you going to do about the forgery, doctor?" Jack asked.

"I am going to try and find out who it is and then give him the benefit of the law."

"I hope you will, sir," said Jack. "I am going to hunt down the rascals. The poor girl has but few friends and I am going to stand by her to the last."

"So am I," replied Tom Hardin, in very positive tones.

"And I sincerely hope that you will succeed in catching the rascals," said the doctor. "I will render you all the assistance in my power."

They thanked him kindly, and left the hospital together.

"Tom," said Jack, "there is a mystery about this thing that puzzles me. The police think she has run away with some fellow, but I know better. Cora Edgeworth would not leave her mother for any fellow in the world. Now what puzzles me most is this—she has not been keeping company with any young man. Evelyn Cassel is her only companion, even of her own sex. Who, then, could have done this thing? What is the motive that prompted it?"

"Ah! That is the question that has been running through my mind for over an hour. I don't see who would have any motive in playing such a trick."

"No. She has no beaux after her."

"By Heaven's, Jack!" exclaimed Tom, coming to a sudden standstill, "maybe it is those rascals who tried to club us down in Meadow Lane."

"Why, they are not even acquainted with her," responded Jack.

"No, but they may have thought to get even with us in that way."

Jack hung his head in deep thought for several minutes as if trying by mere force of will to penetrate the mystery.

"No, Tom," he replied, shaking his head. "I don't think they had anything to do with it. Somebody else is at the bottom of this, and I think I know who he is."

"Good Heavens, Jack, who is he?"

"A man whom she has refused to marry."

"What? Do you mean that old lawyer, Skinner?"

"Yes."

Tom gave a low whistle expressive of astonishment, and walked briskly down the street with Jack at his side.

CHAPTER XIX.

JACK AND THE LAWYER'S LANDLADY.

"Jack Conway," he asked, after they had walked two or three blocks together, "what in the world made you think that old rascal was at the bottom of it?"

"Because he is in love with her and she has rejected him."

"But do you really think him so far gone as that, Jack Conway?"

"I don't know. I want to investigate it. It is barely possible that he is at the bottom of it all. In the absence of any other clue, I intend to follow this one up."

"What will you do?"

"Go and see Skinner at once and ascertain what I can from him."

"Why, he would not tell you anything."

"Of course not, but I can form my own conclusions after talking with him."

"Do you want me to go, too?"

"No. Wait for me at your room. I will go and see him right away."

"Then I will go back to the poor mother and encourage her as much as I can. You will find me there."

"All right."

They shook hands and parted. It was now dark. Jack nor Tom were disposed to take any supper, so much were they disposed to work without losing time."

Jack went to the boarding house of Mrs. Sandford and asked for Skinner.

"He don't live here," answered Peggy, the hired girl of all work.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Jack, astonished at the news.

"No; he moved away the next day after the fire, sir."

Jack was amazed.

Why had he moved away from his old quarters?"

It was a suspicious movement under the circumstances.

"Where has he gone?" he asked of Peggy.

"I don't know, sir."

"Is there any one in the house who does know?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Is the landlady in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can I see her?"

"Yes, sir. Come in, sir, and I will call her down."

Jack entered the neat sitting room of the old-established boarding house, and took a seat to wait for the appearance of the landlady.

Mrs. Sandford soon appeared and Jack arose and bowed to her as if she were the highest born dame of the land.

"Madam," he said, "I am in search of Mr. Abram Skinner, the lawyer, who, I understand, has lived a number of years in your house."

"Mr. Skinner lived in my house a good long time, sir," said Mrs. Standford, "but he changed his quarters the next day after the great fire in which he came so near losing his life."

"Can you tell me, madam, where he now lives?"

"Indeed I cannot, sir, for the reason that I do not know. I think he went to a hotel, however, but which one, I don't know."

Jack was puzzled and something in his face caused the widow to ask:

"Is there anything wrong, sir?"

"That is what I am trying to find out, ma'am," he replied,

"Can you, or will you, tell me why he left the house?"

She seemed very astonished at the question and made no answer, other than to stare at him.

"It is very important, ma'am," he said after a pause of several seconds, "that I have information on that point."

"Why, who are you?" she asked, getting somewhat uneasy.

"I am Jack Conway," he replied, "I was with him on the night of the fire."

"Oh, so you are Hook and Ladder Jack?" she exclaimed.

"That is what the boys sometimes call me, ma'am. I—I—"

"Oh, yes, sir. I know you!" and she became all at once an animated center of amiability. "Just take a seat, and I will tell you all I know about it."

"Thanks, ma'am," said he, dropping into a seat. "You are very kind."

"Excuse me, just one minute, Mr. Conway," and she darted out of the room to inform her daughters who her visitor was.

The news flew from room to room, and every lady boarder began to crimp and dress for a hasty visit to the parlor. They

all wanted to see Hook and Ladder Jack and be able to say that they knew him personally.

Mrs. Sandford returned to the parlor and seated herself beside the young fireman and said:

"If I tell you why he left the house, Mr. Conway, you will have to give me your word that you will not repeat it, as it is a very delicate affair—one of which I should not speak of to you, see."

"Of course, ma'am. The secret shall remain locked in my own breast."

"Oh, I know you will not say a word about it. You see Mr. Skinner is a bachelor and an old man—an old friend of mine. He has lived many years in my house, and was considered as one of the family. Of late he has been showing me some very marked attentions, and the other day he suddenly took me all aback by asking me to marry him."

"Eh? What?" exclaimed Jack in most unbounded amazement.

"He asked me to marry him, and I flatly refused him. The idea of my marrying an old sour-tempered man like him! Of course, he could not remain in the house after that, and so he moved out. I have not seen him since."

Jack was the picture of astonishment. He could not fully believe his senses

"Madam!" he said, "excuse me, but you astonish me. Was he in earnest, do you think?"

"I thought he was, sir, and was very earnest in my refusal of his offer. Why do you ask?"

"Because I happen to know that he proposed marriage to a certain young lady friend of mine the very same week."

"Mercy on me!" exclaimed the widow. "Whoever could it be? The man must be perfectly crazy to marry somebody! I don't believe he could love any one, and only wants to have some one to nurse him in his old age. Ah! Here's my daughter, Mr. Conway!" and the widow arose as her daughter entered the room, and introduced her. Then followed the other daughter and all the female boarders, who were introduced. He was not slow to see that he was on exhibition, and soon bowed himself out.

CHAPTER XX.

IN A MAD HOUSE.

Let us now return to Cora Edgeworth who had so mysteriously disappeared from sight.

The moment she was rendered unconscious, the carriage was driven in another direction from that which it had first taken. It drove rapidly toward the southern suburbs of the city, where the houses were scattered to a more or less degree.

Just outside the city limits, in the midst of very extensive grounds, surrounded by a high wall that inclosed some twenty acres, stood a large stone house, gray and gloomy in its solitude.

People in that section avoided it, for it was a private insane asylum—a mad-house—kept by a Dr. Glumm, a German physician, with a long list of diplomas from obscure medical institutions somewhere in Europe. He had come to Waterville twenty years before, purchased the old stone building, made additions to it, built a wall around the premises and advertised it as a private asylum for the keeping and treatment of insane patients.

The carriage in which our heroine was being rapidly borne away, drove toward the mad-house. On reaching it, the gate swung back noiselessly on its hinges, and the carriage passed through. At the door of the gloomy old stone house, the carriage stopped. A man came out and a short whispered con-

versation took place between him and the woman who was inside the carriage.

"This is the lady that was to be brought here, to-night, sir," she said to the man.

"Ah, yes! She goes to room 24. All right. She is asleep, I see."

"Yes, sir. Do not awake her if you can possibly avoid it."

The man took the unconscious form of Cora Edgeworth from the carriage and bore it into the house. The woman followed, after dismissing the carriage, and the door closed.

There was not a single light to be seen from any of the windows of the mad-house. Everything was as dark and silent as the tomb.

Following a dimly lighted corridor, and going up a flight of stairs, the man bearing the unconscious form of Cora in his arms, stopped in front of a strong oaken door. He pushed it with his foot and it moved slowly back on its hinges.

The room was dimly lighted from a gas jet eight feet from the floor. The walls were of solid, unplastered stone, and were repulsive in appearance. In one corner stood a small, iron cot fastened securely to the floor. In another corner was a small table, rendered immovable in the same way. There was a chair near the table and a stool near the bed—both immovable, being fastened to the floor by means of iron rivets.

She was laid on the cot and left alone. The door was left ajar, and after the man left, a woman came in with a bundle of clothes, of a certain color and coarse material, in her arms.

She lost no time in stripping the unconscious victim of her clothing, and putting on her, instead, the clothes she had brought with her.

This done, she left the room, closing the heavy, oaken door behind her with a dull, heavy sound that seemed like a death-knell to the one within.

It was nearly noon the next morning when Cora Edgeworth arose from her sleep into which the powerful drug had thrown her. She glared around the strange room like one in a dream—sat up and rubbed her eyes and looked around again.

The light of the room came from two windows that were high up out of reach.

"Where am I?" she gasped, jumping up in bed and looking around in vain for some familiar object. "Whose clothes are these I have on? How came I here? What does this all mean?"

Thoroughly alarmed, she sprang out of bed, and ran to the door of the apartment. It was as immovable as the stone walls of the room.

"Oh, my God!" she exclaimed, staggering to the little chair by the table, "I am a prisoner! This is a dungeon! What does it mean? Why am I here? How did I get here? I can remember nothing about coming here. Oh, my poor mother! Where are you? Where am I?"

She buried her face in her hands and burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping, which continued for a long time.

When she was more composed, she again examined the room. She was more and more puzzled to account for her presence there, as well as for the strange clothes she had on. She could not recollect anything beyond the strange woman in the carriage putting a handkerchief to her face, for then she instantly became unconscious.

"It must have been that there was some powerful drug in that handkerchief," she said, "for I remember distinctly that it had an over-powering odor about it. Oh, if I only knew that poor mother was well and comfortable! What does this mean? What does it mean? It seems so like a dream. Is this a real dark dungeon? It looks like one. Oh, mother! mother! where are you?"

She then examined her clothes again. There was not a

single garment on her that she could remember having seen before. Such coarse stuff and so strange in color.

She spent an hour thus, and then she was startled by the rattling of chains and the jingling of keys. It was impossible to tell in which direction the sounds were. But she waited, and in another half hour she heard the jingling of keys at the door of the very room which she occupied.

Suddenly she heard an iron bolt shoot back and then saw the heavy oaken door swing back on its hinges.

She sprang to her feet and confronted a tall, powerful looking man who entered the room. Darting forward, she looked at his face, as if to find some traces of a kindly nature there.

"Oh, I know you!" she gasped, pressing both hands tightly over her heart. "You were—pointed out—to me—once—on the—street. You are—a—mad-house—keeper!" and then she sank to the floor in a death-like swoon.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TRIO OF VILLAINS—THE SIGNATURE.

She looked up in his face and saw no pity there.

Her heart sank in her bosom like a lump of lead.

"Do you know me?" he asked after a pause of a few moments.

"Yes," she replied. "You are Dr. Glumm, are you not?"

"Yes, I am glad to see you are getting better. How did you come to know me?"

"I was on Main street one day when you drove by. One of the girls said, 'There goes Dr. Glumm, who keeps the mad-house and then I took a look at you. Where am I?'"

"You are in the asylum for the insane," he replied.

"But what am I here for? I am not insane."

"You have been insane for over two years," he said, "but I think you are very much improved. You must not let yourself get excited in any way. You were so raving mad yesterday that you did not know your best friends."

Cora stared in dumbfounded horror. For several moments she could not utter a word. Speech was absolutely denied her for a moment.

"Mad! Insane!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, and very violent," he said.

"How long have I been here, doctor?"

"Over two years."

She sprang to her feet and stared at him.

"Doctor, you are not telling me the truth. I was brought here last night, after being drugged in a carriage! I am not insane, and I never have been."

"My dear child," said the doctor, "you have been regularly committed by the court, on the certificates of three physicians. This is the first lucid moment you have had since coming here, over two years ago. An old friend of yours called yesterday, and you did not know her."

"Who was it?"

"Miss Cassel."

"Evelyn Cassel! Why they sent for me, saying that she was insane, and it was when on the way to the hospital to see her, that I was drugged and brought here."

"She is not insane now, at all events," said the doctor. "She has been here week after week, month after month, to see if you would know her. But you never knew any one until this morning."

She grew sick at heart, and sank down on the cot again, as if too weak to stand up.

"A Mr. Conway came to see you several times," the doctor continued, "but you grew very violent, and every time you

caught sight of him, you wanted to fly at him and tear his eyes out."

At the mention of the name Conway, Cora looked up quickly.

"Will he come again?" she asked.

"I presume he will."

"Will you let me see him, if he does?"

"Oh, yes. We never deny one's friends the pleasure of a visit. I hope you may soon be able to go out as thoroughly cured."

"Has my mother been here?"

"Yes. She came nearly every day for a year, and then, thinking you incurable, as we all did, she went away from Waterville. She has not been heard from for a year or more, now."

A despairing cry burst from Cora and she buried her head in her hands, weeping and moaning as if in great mental agony.

"Oh, my poor mother! My poor mother!" she moaned and sobbed. "I know your heart is broken! My poor mother!"

When she looked up through her tears again, she found herself alone.

The doctor had retired and locked the door after him.

She gazed around the room like one in a dream.

"Oh, this is horrible!" she exclaimed with a shudder. "It is like some terrible dream. It cannot be true. I have not been here for two years. I have not been insane a single moment. How long I remained unconscious under that drug, I do not know, but it was not long. I know it is all false. Oh, Jack Conway, if you knew where I was, you would save me as you did from the fire."

She arose to her feet once more and went to the door. It was locked and bolted and was too strong for one far stronger than she to break.

With a sinking heart, she returned to the cot, and threw herself on it in a paroxysm of woe.

How long she remained there, she knew not. She could not reckon the flight of time in her situation. Hours seemed days; and minutes hung back like slow receding hours.

Suddenly she heard the jingling of keys again, and she sprang up to meet any new danger that might menace her.

The door opened and Dr. Glumm entered, accompanied by another man.

"Here is one of the physicians of the asylum," said the doctor. "He has been attending you for two years. He may report you cured, Miss Edgeworth, and ——"

"Oh, for God's sake tell me I am not insane—never have been!" she cried as the man looked her in the eyes, felt her pulse and talked with her for a few moments.

"You are much improved," he said after a moment's pause. "You are very much improved since yesterday morning. Your case might be laid before the judge who issued your commitment warrant. I think it would be safe to do so. Shall I send in a lawyer to make out the application for you?"

"Yes—yes—yes! For Heaven's sake let me get out of this horrible place."

"Very well. Such things have to take their regular course through the courts. So you must not be too impatient. Keep perfectly quiet. Too much excitement might cause a return of your malady."

"Doctor, I have never been insane, or ——"

"My dear child," he said, "if you talk in that strain before the judge, he will say you are not cured yet, and remand you back to the institution. I will send a lawyer to take your application."

They both turned and left the room, Glumm locking the heavy oaken door behind him.

Cora paced the room in a perfect storm of contending emotions.

"Oh, what does all this mean?" she moaned walking to and fro like a restless, uneasy spirit.

The door opened again, and this time another man accompanied Dr. Glumm.

It was Skinner, the old lawyer.

"Oh, Mr. Skinner," replied Cora, with all the eagerness of a drowning man grasping at a straw. "Save me! Save me! You once loved me! Save me! Of all the men in the world, you can save me!"

"My poor child," said the old villain, pretending to break down entirely. "How you must have suffered! Of course, I will save you. The doctors say you have improved very much. I have watched your case this two years, even appealing to the Supreme Court in your behalf. But everybody thought you hopelessly insane. I never did. I even offered to marry you to get you out of this place and put you in an elegant home of your own, with carriage and servants at your disposal, believing that you would recover soon. But the court said that an insane person could not marry, and I had to submit. Doctor, give me pen, ink and paper. This lady is as sane as I am. I will write her application at once."

The things were brought in and the old lawyer eagerly wrote for five minutes. A new hope sprang into Cora's heart. The old lawyer had some good in him, after all, she thought.

When he was through writing, he sprang up and said:

"There! Just put your full name on that line there, and the doctor will witness it."

"Cora Edgeworth."

"Witness, doctor," said Skinner as she gave up the pen.

"Heinrich Glumm—witness," followed her signature on the left, at which a triumphant gleam shot from the cold gray eyes of the old lawyer.

CHAPTER XXII.

WEAVING THE NET.

When Cora Edgeworth had signed her name to the paper which Lawyer Skinner had written in her presence, she thought she would soon be free from the restraint of the asylum.

She saw the old lawyer take the paper and clutch it eagerly whilst a smile of triumph overspread his face.

"You will soon be out of this, my dear Miss Edgeworth," he said. "I shall work day and night until I get the decree that shall open the doors of this asylum for you."

"Oh, may Heaven help you do it!" she cried. "I will go mad if I stay here a week. My God, what have I done that I should be so horribly punished?"

"Don't excite yourself, dear Miss Edgeworth," he said. "I will return as soon as I have seen the judge and let you know the result of the application."

"Oh, I shall pray until you come back."

He took her hand in his, bent low over it and imprinted a kiss on it. She did not withdraw it, for she regarded him as her best friend at that time.

A few moments later she was alone with her thoughts again. She sat down and mentally offered a prayer for the success of the application to the court.

The hours seemed ages to her. She laid down and slept, for she was greatly exhausted, both mentally and physically.

She slept a long time—nearly fourteen hours. When she awoke, she was very hungry. An old woman brought her a breakfast of toast, eggs and coffee, which she ate with great relish, for hope was in her soul.

"How long have I slept?" she asked of the old woman, but no answer came.

The old woman was as deaf as the walls of the room in which she was then standing.

Cora touched her arm and repeated the question.

The old woman shook her head and Cora gave it up as a useless task.

When she was through eating, the old woman took up the tray and left the room. The moment she passed the threshold the massive doors swung to and closed with a solid thud, that made the poor girl shudder as though convulsed with ague.

Hours hung heavy on her hands. Another night came, and with it came the old lawyer in his best Sunday suit.

She flew to meet him as he entered the door of her cell.

"What news? What news do you bring me?" she cried.

"I have seen the judge," he said, "and gave him your application. He read it carefully through and said that he would give it due consideration. I urged him to give it immediate consideration, and he has promised to do so. I shall call upon him to-morrow morning and try to obtain his decision. These cases sometimes hang for months in the courts before they are acted upon. But I shall get the judge to decide your case at once, else I shall appeal to a higher court, or—" and he glanced suspiciously toward the grim-looking Dr. Glumm, who was standing near the door, "bring a party of friends here and"—bending low and whispering in her ear—"take you out by main force, for you are no more insane than I am."

She looked up in his face, clutched his hand and covered it with tears and kisses.

"Oh, if you only will, I will be your debtor forever," she said.

"I may not be able to protect you from the law," he said, "if I take you out by force," he whispered, "except in one way."

"How is that way? Tell me—tell me!"

"As the wife of some man, your husband could hold you against all the lawyers and courts in the land."

She looked inquiringly at him for a minute or so.

"I am ready to accord you that protection at any time," he added, "for I have loved you from the first time I saw you."

She was puzzled.

She was silent.

"Of course, you are perfectly free in your choice about the way you wish to leave here," he said. "You can depend upon the law releasing you at some period of your life, if the doctors do not report against you again. You are certainly cured now. At least I think so, and I am willing to risk my happiness upon it. I am no expert on insanity, but I think I know a sane person when I talk with him or her."

"Mr. Skinner," she asked, "if the doctors report against me, what will they do with me?"

"Continue you for life, probably, right where you are," was the reply.

"Would you still believe me sane if they reported against me?"

"Yes, if you remained as you are now."

"And would marry me?"

"Yes."

"Then, I shall marry you if they so report," she said, "though I do not love you."

"Ha! You say so?"

"Yes."

"Then you shall be free within a week! Hark!"

A wild shriek ran through the old stone building that made the old lawyer shrink up in his terror.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JACK MEETS SKINNER AT DINNER AND SHADOWS HIM AGAIN.

Upon leaving the boarding house of Mrs. Sandford, Jack called at the office of Lawyer Skinner.

The lawyer was in conversation with a man of low character, whom Jack did not know, but who, in reality, was the very man who had carried forward the abduction of Cora Edgeworth, instigated by old Skinner, as the reader must suspect by this time.

Little did Jack know of the facts of the case, though.

The lawyer greeted him affably, but Jack stated his business immediately.

He told of the abduction of Cora, and that he had his suspicions in the matter, and wanted him to help him hunt her up, after which he left, leaving the lawyer in anything but a happy frame of mind.

After Jack's departure, the lawyer turned to the man he had been in conversation with when Jack entered.

"Look here, Sowboy, that fellow is on our track and has got to be put out of the way."

"What is it worth?"

"I will give you five hundred dollars to get away with him."

"Taken. He will be deader than a herrin' when I get my hands on him."

Shortly afterward the villain departed.

Jack, in the meantime was looking everywhere for a clue to the missing girl.

He always went disguised.

One night, Jack had a strange dream, in which he fancied he saw a gloomy building, and in the window of which stood a female, calling to him to save her, and he thought he recognized the girl as Cora Edgeworth, and that he rescued her.

The next morning, however, he thought no more of it, as shortly afterward he was called away to headquarters by the clanging of the fire-bell.

The fire was in a row of houses, and, as usual, Jack ascended to the third floor to rescue an old lady.

While doing so, the building collapsed, carrying Jack and the old lady into the cellar.

But through some kind act of Providence, they were unhurt, and Jack succeeded in escaping through into another house with the old lady, unperceived, and escorted her home.

Jack was given up for dead by everybody, no one having seen his escape.

Jack stayed some time at the old lady's home, and when he was rested, he took his departure amid many expressions of thanks from the old lady who had met the adventure at the home of her niece, and the rest of the household.

On his way down-town, Hook and Ladder Jack was in a thoughtful mood. He was thinking of poor Cora Edgeworth and her mother, wondering if he could ever be the instrument of bring them together again.

"Hyer's yer extra!" cried a newsboy. "Complete account of the death of Hook and Ladder Jack!"

"Give me one, bub," said Jack, tossing him a penny.

The boy gave him one and then ran on down the street, yelling like a young Comanche Indian.

Jack opened the paper and read a graphic description of his death in the fire the night before, whilst attempting to save a rich old widow lady by the name of Huntington, who was on a visit to her niece at the time of the fire. Of course, the paper recounted his many valiant exploits, and eulogized him in the most brilliant terms.

Pulling his hat down over his face as far as he could without exciting suspicion, Jack made his way to a costumer's, where he purchased a wig and beard, so as to effectually conceal his identity. He saw no one who knew him, and after the disguise was put on he had no hesitation in going among his friends.

The many kind words he heard in reference to himself drew tears from him. But he preserved his incognito, and resolved to keep it up during the day and evening.

"Ah!" he suddenly ejaculated, "I forgot one thing. I must

go back and see Mrs. Huntington, and request the family not to let the public know of her escape until to-morrow morning. I know she will not refuse my request when I give her my reason for asking it."

He made haste to return to the residence of the old lady whom he had saved.

Fortunately it had not reached the neighbors that she had been saved, and she very readily consented to his request without requiring any explanations from him. She was glad to be able to avoid the reporters for one day at least.

Jack then returned down-town, went to a hotel, ordered a room, and went up to it to get some sleep. He did not dare go to his own quarters for fear of being found out.

"They have taken my things and locked them up by this time," he said. "I might get in with my key, but a stranger, such as this disguise makes me, would get fired out very quick."

He slept the greater part of the afternoon, notwithstanding the fact that he had numerous painful burns on various parts of his person.

When he awoke, he felt greatly refreshed. He bathed his face copiously, took a strong tonic, and then went to dinner in a restaurant not far from the hotel in which he had been sleeping.

It happened to be the restaurant in which Skinner himself frequently took his meals. Jack was, therefore, gratified to see him come and take a seat at the table next to his.

He gazed at the wily old lawyer for several minutes, and thought that he could detect an expression of intense satisfaction on his face. What it was that made him appear so pleased to himself, was a puzzle to the daring young fireman. But he resolved to ascertain, if possible.

When both had been eating for some time, Jack remarked, by way of introducing himself:

"Excuse me, sir, but I see your city was visited by quite a destructive fire this morning."

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "It was quite destructive. Are you a stranger in Waterville?"

"Yes, sir; that is, I live in New York, but I am a little acquainted in Waterville, as I frequently have business which brings me here. I see that one of your firemen was lost in the fire."

"Yes; and an old lady with him. Conway was a brave fellow, but very meddlesome, and had a good many enemies in the city who will shed no tears over his taking off."

"The papers say that he was the most popular fireman in the city."

"Oh, yes, of course. Everybody speaks well of the dead, you know."

"Yes, they do. But was he not very popular?"

"With a certain class he was. He was a very rough kind of fellow; always ready to engage in a fight or pick a quarrel under the slightest pretense. Such men always have a certain following in all large cities."

"I see in the paper that he had saved quite a number of people from death by fire since he became a fireman."

"Oh, yes. He was daring enough and risked his life frequently for the applause it brought him."

"One of the papers makes mention of a lawyer named Skinner, whom he saved under very peculiar circumstances. Do you know anything about the lawyer?"

"Oh, yes; I know him very well," was the reply.

"Is the account true in regard to his rescue?"

"I guess it is," said Skinner, trying to be indifferent about the subject.

"It seems to me that if a man were to save me from death at the risk of his own life, I would be that man's best friend through life, no matter what he became in the future. In-

gratitude is certainly one of the blackest spots on human nature.

Skinner winced.

Jack saw that he was hard hit, and concluded to follow it up.

"Has any one of his rescues done anything for him?" he asked.

"Not that I am aware of," was the reply.

"Hanged if I think any man in Waterville worth saving, then," he blurted out.

Skinner turned to his meal, and for several minutes seemed to be engaged in putting it where it would do the most good.

"I am going to hunt up and interview that lawyer if I have time, before I leave Waterville," said Jack after a lapse of five minutes.

"I saw him last night," said Skinner, very quickly, "just as he was boarding the train for Boston to negotiate some heavy business for a New York house. He informed me that the Tremont House would be his stopping place while he was there."

"Indeed! How long will he be absent from the city?"

"Two weeks, I understood him to say."

"Sorry, I can't see him then," remarked the disguised fireman.

Skinner rose and left the table without so much as bowing to the supposed New Yorker. Jack chuckled in his sleeve at the uncomfortable feeling he had given the old rascal.

"I will follow him, and see where he goes to-night," said Jack, rising from the table, paying his check, and leaving the restaurant in time to regain sight of Skinner as he left the hotel, whither he had gone after dinner.

"Now, old fellow," he muttered, "we will see where you are bound for to-night. You may be an innocent man, but I have no faith in men who have no sense of gratitude."

Skinner went to his office and locked himself in. Jack had wonderful patience. He stood over across the street and waited nearly two hours. His patience was rewarded at last. Skinner came out and returned to his hotel.

From the position that he had across the street, Jack could see that he was dressing himself with unusual care.

"He is going out again," said the young fireman.

Shortly after old Skinner came out of the hotel and started for the most uninhabited part of the city, Jack following him.

"Where in the world can he be going out this way?" Jack asked himself a dozen times as he followed him down the street, block after block.

"He can't be simply walking for exercise! He would not dress up for that. No, he is going to see some lady or ladies, and I am going to find out all about it."

By and by the city limits were reached. Jack had never been out so far on that particular street, and knew nothing about the houses or residents in that part of the city.

At last the old lawyer reached the gate in the high wall that surrounded the private Insane Asylum of Dr. Glumm.

He gave a certain number of knocks at the gate, and it was noiselessly opened to him. He entered and the gate silently closed behind him.

"Why, what place is this?" muttered Jack, looking around. "I was never here before, and yet there is a strangely familiar look about this place. I have seen that wall and gate before, or one like it; yet I know I have never been here before. I will climb up that tree over there and take a look at the place."

He was a good climber and in a few minutes he was above the wall some ten feet in the branches of a tree.

The moonlight gave a weird-like appearance to everything. He gazed at the old stone house with its old-time gable ends

and wings—later additions to the original buildings, and wondered why the place seemed so strangely familiar to him.

The old stone house seemed to be engraved on the tablets of his memory, and he knew just how certain rooms inside were situated.

Suddenly he grew deadly pale and came near falling from his perch.

"My God!" he exclaimed, clutching the limb, "I know why it seems so familiar. This is the place where I dreamed of rescuing Cora the other night."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MEMORY OF A DREAM.

The sudden recollection of his dream came very near making Jack lose his balance. It came upon him like a flash—like a blow between the eyes—and gave him a shock such as no peril had ever given him.

He sat there for more than an hour looking on.

Not a sign of life about the place did he see, nor did he hear any sounds that appeared to come from human beings.

At last he concluded that when Skinner left the place, it would be to return to the hotel.

He descended from the tree and started to return to the city by the same route that he had come.

When but a short distance from the asylum, he met an old man coming along leisurely on foot. The old man had been imbibing pretty freely and was about half seas over.

"Hello!" he said, by way of stopping him.

"Hello! Whoa, now!" exclaimed the straggler, suddenly halting, straightening himself up and glaring around in a half interested way.

"Do you know what place that is back there?" Jack asked him.

"Whoa, now—will ye? What place, mister?"

The half drunken man evidently thought he was driving his team.

"That old stone house back there—surrounded by a stone wall," said Jack.

"Oh, yes—whoa, Bill! That is old Glumm's mad-house, that is," said the old man, lurching to the left, and swearing at his imaginary team.

"Great God!" gasped Jack; "Glumm's Insane Asylum. I have heard of it, and I never knew where it was;" and he turned and gazed back in the direction of the mad-house, wondering deep down in his soul whether Cora Edgeworth was an inmate of it.

"Gee up!" shouted the inebriated old man as he started homeward.

Jack looked at him, and thought him a queer fellow to be so consistent in his drunken imaginings, and then turned in the direction of the city again.

"Glumm's mad-house!" he muttered. "Great Heavens! I wonder what Skinner is doing there? Does he dress in his Sunday clothes to transact his legal business there? I cannot fathom it, but I will go through that asylum if I have got to get Hook and Ladder Company No. 1 to go through with me. She may not be in there, but I will know before daylight. I will go back and get the boys. I know they will stand for me, because I have always stood by them in every pinch. Bob Graham and a half dozen will be enough. Yes, I will do it, and if we don't find her there we can apologize to the doctor, and come away. If we do find her—God help those who put her there."

He wended his way back toward his old quarters again, resolved in his own mind to go through the insane asylum before

he slept that night, if he could persuade enough of his friends to go with him.

He had not gone many blocks ere he saw a light in the southern part of the city, from whence he had just come, that seemed to indicate the presence of a conflagration. He stood and gazed at it for a few moments. The light grew brighter. A moment later he heard the great fire-bell ring out on the air. Following the great bell came a man on horseback, riding like Gilpin, yelling:

"The asylum is on fire."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ASYLUM ON FIRE—JACK TO THE RESCUE.

The weird wail that startled the old lawyer while he was conversing with Cora Edgeworth in the insane asylum came from one of the insane patients of the institution. It almost unnerved Cora as it grated on her sensitive hearing. It had a similar effect on old Skinner himself.

"Can't you stop that noise, doctor?" the lawyer asked.

"I will see," said the doctor, going out of the room.

The moment that Skinner found himself with Cora alone, he leaned toward her until his face nearly touched hers and asked:

"Is he really kind to you?"

"No one who keeps me locked up against my will is kind to me," she answered.

"I have heard that he was cruel and unfeeling in his treatment of his patients."

"I don't know," she said. "I have not seen any of his patients, although I have heard some awful shrieks and wails from some of them. Oh, it is horrible."

"Poor child, I know it is. If the court does not release you to-morrow, I will try violence, and take you away by force. But, mark me, I could not hold you unless you were my wife."

Just then another weird wail rang through the building, causing both to shudder as though a voice from the dead had disturbed them.

Five minutes passed and then a chorus of shrieks and yells was heard.

Some screamed as if in agony of pain.

"There must be some cruelty going on here," said Cora, "or those poor things would not shriek so. I—I—smell smoke, Mr. Skinner."

Skinner's experience with fires had been such as to make him dread it more than any other element.

The mention of smoke made him spring to his feet and dart toward the door which Dr. Glumm had closed behind him when he went out.

Pulling the door open, he was horrified to find the corridor beyond filled with smoke and flame.

A shriek of dismay burst from him. He seemed perfectly crazed by the peril.

"The house is on fire!" he yelled, running around the room like a wild hyena.

Then he made a dash through the door and out into the corridor, uttering wild shrieks of:

"Save me! Save me!"

Cora ran to the door and also looked out.

The corridor was full of flame and smoke.

She dared not venture into it. It seemed like certain death to go out into the vortex of fire.

Springing back, she involuntarily closed the door, which kept the smoke out.

"The walls are of stone," she said calmly to herself. "Only

the door is of wood. Help will surely come. Our brave firemen will be here. Oh, if brave, noble Jack Conway were here."

Certain sounds that she had not heard before, came to her listening ears through the roaring flames.

"They are our brave firemen!" she exclaimed. "Oh, if I could only show them my face at the window! They would risk everything to save me! Help! Help!"

She screamed herself hoarse and it seemed to her that her voice could not be heard through those stone walls.

"Oh, Jack Conway!" she exclaimed. "You are not here to save me! You have been burned to death as I shall soon be! Hark! I hear them trying to get up to the windows! No! They are trying in the corridor! I hear them! Oh, God, protect them! How can they stay there and live!"

Amid the roaring and crackling of the flames, she heard the blows of an ax.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Then she heard the hissing of the water from the engine as it fell upon the flames. Water rushed in under the door and formed a pool on the floor.

The blows came nearer and nearer.

Suddenly she heard the ax strike the door of her room.

The door trembled from top to bottom.

The ax came through, scattering splinters clear across the room.

Another blow and a panel fell out.

She saw a red-shirted fireman outside.

"Cora! Cora!" called the fireman, sending the door to the floor with another blow.

"Jack! Jack!" she cried, scarcely believing her eyes.

"Cora, Cora!" he again called, rushing toward her with outstretched arms. "Come to me. I will save or perish with you!"

"Oh, it is Jack, it is Jack!" she cried, throwing herself into his arms. "I thought you were dead and I wanted to die, too."

"No—I've—been—looking—everywhere—for—you!"

He clasped her to his heart and darted out into the corridor with her.

She closed her eyes and clung to him as her only hope of life.

They rolled down the stairs together, and the shouts of the firemen told her that she was saved.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JACK CONWAY PLAYS GHOST.

When the horseman dashed by Jack, crying out that the asylum was on fire, Jack was almost paralyzed for a minute or two.

He gazed in the direction of the light, as if he were not conscious of what he just heard.

But after a minute or two he seemed to recover himself again.

"Great Heavens!" he exclaimed. "I dreamed I took her out of that building while it was burning! It is burning now! She is there! I will go with the boys and go into the very room I dreamed of."

He was now aroused to a terrible energy. The fire-bell had sent half the engines to the fire.

Hook and Ladder Company, with Bob Graham, the assistant foreman, dashed by at full speed. Jack saw that the wagon was draped in deep mourning for him.

"I will join them!" he exclaimed, dashing off toward the quarters of the company, which was only two blocks away.

An old fireman was in charge of the quarters.

He tried to prevent Jack from entering, not knowing who he was.

Dashing in, Jack put on his red shirt and helmet, seized his silver trumpet, which was covered with black crepe, and turned to leave when the old fireman confronted him.

The old fireman instantly recognized him in his fireman's uniform, and, uttering a yell of terror, turned and fled from the ladder house.

Most men are superstitious about meeting or seeing the ghost of dead people. The old fireman was no exception to the rule.

In the meantime Jack was dashing on toward the fire.

The hook and ladder company got there a little ahead of him.

Bob Graham, trumpet in hand, was giving orders, when he, as well as the entire company was astounded at hearing the well-known voice of Hook and Ladder Jack:

"Run up the ladder to the window!"

They wheeled and turned in the direction of the voice, and saw him standing in the full glare of the light, trumpet in hand, pointing upward toward the window.

Every man stood rooted to the spot, gazing at him with blanched faces.

"Do your duty men!" he cried. "I am in command to-night."

"Obey Hook and Ladder Jack!" cried Bob Graham, the assistant foreman.

"Hurrah for Hook and Ladder Jack!" yelled one of the men, and the entire company set up a cheer that for a moment drowned the roar of the flames. But though they worked like beavers, they kept their eyes on Jack, for they believed it was his ghost they saw. They had seen him going into the burning building the night before, and saw the floors fall with him and the fire overwhelm him. That he was alive, they would not, could not believe.

The ladder was run up to the window as he ordered.

"Give me an ax!" he cried.

Bob seized an ax and tossed it to him. He caught it in his right hand and ran up the ladder like a squirrel.

"Jack Conway's ghost! The fire can't hurt him," ran from mouth to mouth.

He disappeared inside the burning building, apparently going through a solid blaze of fire.

They waited with breathless interest to hear from him. Many believed his ghost would hereafter accompany them to fires and disappear in flames and smoke.

Hark! They hear the stalwart blows of the ax he carried with him.

They hear the crash of woodwork and a moment later the shrill cries of a woman for help.

No man among that band of brave firemen dared to ascend the ladder.

A dense volume of smoke and flame belched from the window.

Crash! Crash!

They heard a door fall.

A scream followed.

Suddenly they were amazed at seeing him appear at the front door of the building with a woman in his arms.

They had rolled down the stairs together.

A wild cheer rent the air, and Bob Graham rushed forward to drag them away.

As he went forward to drag them away from the fire, Bob Graham felt that he was coming in contact with the ghost of his former chief. But a woman was in imminent peril, and he would risk contact with the dead.

Jack was on his feet in an instant.

He was almost blinded by the heat and smoke and did not recognize Bob.

"O, no!" he hoarsely cried, pushing Bob away, "she is mine! She is mine!" and then he ran with her clasped in his arm, toward the gate of the inclosure.

The most intense excitement prevailed among the firemen and spectators.

Dr. Glumm, who knew who he was, cried out:

"The man is running away with one of the patients!"

Not one of the firemen dared pursue him.

"Stop that man!" yelled the doctor, running after him at full speed.

The doctor was a large, powerful man.

He overtook Jack and caught hold of him.

"Release that woman, sir!" he demanded.

Jack released her instant.

But he fastened on the doctor.

No tiger in his native jungle was ever more fierce than was Jack Conway in his attack upon Dr. Glumm.

Whack! Whack!

Thump! Thump!

"Help! Murder!" roared the doctor, making a desperate effort to get away from his assailant.

Every fireman left his post and crowded around to see the strange combat.

Yet none dared to go close enough to Hook and Ladder Jack to touch him.

In just one minute, Dr. Glumm was lying upon the ground, insensible and bleeding.

Jack had given him a terrible thumping for a few seconds.

The police rushed in and proceeded to arrest him. He resisted and they drew their clubs, four of them.

"Hook and Ladder men!" cried Cora Edgeworth, turning to the astonished firemen, "stand by your hero! Don't let them have him!"

"Hook and Ladder Jack!" cried Bob Graham. "He is alive, boys. Stand by him. Don't let the cops have him!"

"Hurrah for Jack!" yelled the men, rushing forward like an avalanche.

In a moment the four policemen were overpowered and driven back helter-skelter. The hook and ladder men rallied around Jack.

Such a scene of wild, joyous enthusiasm as then ensued, has seldom been witnessed anywhere on earth. The firemen yelled themselves hoarse and fairly danced like cannibals around him. He held on to Cora's hand, saying to her:

"Don't be uneasy. These are our friends and would die for us if necessary."

"I am not afraid when you are near, dear Jack," she said. "You have twice saved my life."

The fire burned until nothing was left but the hot walls of stone. All the water the engines could throw upon it could not stop the devouring element. After it was discovered that their leader was alive, the hook and ladder men paid no more attention to the fire. There was nothing for them to do, in fact.

But on their return, they placed Jack and Cora upon the ladder-truck, and pulled them back to the heart of the city, hurrahing and shouting like so many wild lunatics.

"Jack," said Cora, turning to her rescuer, "how long have I been gone?"

"Three days!" he replied.

"Only three days?"

"That's all."

"Why, they told me that I had been in the asylum for two years a raving maniac."

"Who told you that?"

"Dr. Glumm and Mr. Skinner."

"Skinner!"

"Yes, the old lawyer. He said that he would try to get the court to release me as cured."

Jack gave a whistle expressive of astonishment.

"How did they get you there?" he asked.

She acquainted him with the manner of her abduction just as the reader understands it.

He was amazed.

"Do you know who was at the bottom of that thing?"

"No."

"Did Skinner say anything to you about marrying him?"

"Yes. He said only a husband could protect me under the circumstances, as I had been adjudged an insane person, and that, to save me from a life-time incarceration, he would marry me."

"Great God!" gasped Jack. "He is the greatest, deep-dyed villain alive. He is at the bottom of all this and I suspected him from the first. It was by my shadowing him that I suspected you of being in the insane asylum."

"Oh, I knew you would come. My heart turned to you always as my only hope."

They were sitting on the ladders during the conversation, whilst more than a thousand people walked on either side of them. Such was the noise of the multitude, that no one but themselves could hear what each other said.

"Have you seen my mother?" she asked.

"Yes, and pledged my word never to stop until I restored you to her arms again."

Tears came into her eyes.

"You have been such a good friend to us," she murmured.

"May I be so still?"

"Yes—yes—always!"

"May I be your husband?"

"Oh, Jack! Do you mean it?" she asked, her face lighting up with a happy look.

"Yes, I love you better than I love my own soul, Cora Edgeworth."

"And I love you with all my heart, and soul, and mind, my hero. I will be your wife, if you wish," and she placed her hand in his.

He grasped the hand and held it tightly.

"I do wish it, darling. I have loved you from the first hour I saw you. How shall I labor to make you happy?"

"I shall always be happy if you only love me," she said.

"That, I shall always do, Cora."

Here Bob Graham came to him and asked if they should run the truck down through Meadow Lane.

"Of course," said Jack. "We want to see this young lady home."

"You look as if you didn't care how long we were about it, Jack," returned Bob.

Cora laughed, blushed, and looked happy.

The procession turned in the direction of Meadow Lane and the Edgeworth cottage.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER MEET—LOVERS.

When the hook and ladder truck turned into Meadow Lane it was past the midnight hour; yet a procession of some two or three thousand people followed it, hurrahing and shouting themselves hoarse.

The news flew from mouth to mouth that Hook and Ladder Jack was alive, having had a most miraculous escape through an unknown passage to another house, and so on, out.

It seemed incredible.

People would not believe it until they had seen him with their own eyes. Hundreds sprang out of bed and caught the news from the multitude. They hastily dressed and ran out on the street to hear more about it.

Thus it was when the truck turned into Meadow Lane. The noise attracted the attention of Evelyn Cassel who was staying with the widow Edgeworth. She ran out on the front stoop and gazed up the street.

By the light of the street lamps she saw the red shirts of the uniform of the hook and ladder boys.

Her heart bounded up in her throat.

The truck came into view and she caught sight of a female figure on it.

Instinctively she knew it was Cora.

She flew into the house, exclaiming:

"Oh, Mrs. Edgeworth! They are bringing Cora home in triumph! Just listen to their shouts!"

Mrs. Edgeworth sprang to her feet and darted to the door.

The truck was now in front of the house.

"Cora!" screamed Evelyn.

"Mother! Evelyn!" cried Cora, leaping to the ground, and rushing into her mother's arms.

Mrs. Edgeworth clasped her to her heart and covered her face with kisses.

"Oh, my child! My child!" she cried, tears streaming down her pallid cheeks.

"Mother! mother!" sobbed Cora, "Jack has saved me again."

"Heaven bless him!" said the mother.

Cora and Evelyn ran into each other's arms and mingled their joyous tears.

Jack sprang to the ground and said to the happy mother:

"I have kept my word. You have your daughter again."

"Yes—Heaven bless you, Jack Conway! A mother's blessing shall follow you all the rest of your life."

Jack uncovered his head like a man receiving a benediction. Nearly every man in the crowd uncovered and bowed his head, whilst a profound silence fell upon the assemblage.

But the moment Jack replaced his hat upon his head, a wild cheer burst from the crowd that awoke every sleeper in that part of the city. They cheered him, cheered for Cora, and cheered for Hook and Ladder Company No. 1, and then prepared to escort them back to their quarters.

Jack escorted the ladies into the house. Mrs. Edgeworth was so weak, that he had to almost carry her in his arms. Cora and Evelyn ran in first and set her old arm-chair for her.

"Mrs. Edgeworth," said Jack, bending over her, "I have come to claim my reward. Give me your daughter for a wife—she is willing, and we love each other."

Mrs. Edgeworth looked up quickly at Cora and read in her glowing face the story of her love. But she asked:

"Do you love him, Cora?"

"With all my heart and soul, mother," she replied.

Then she turned to him and said:

"You will not separate us, will you?"

"Never!"

"Then she is yours, and may Heaven bless you both."

Cora sprang forward, threw her arms around her neck, and kissed her repeatedly. Then she threw herself into Evelyn's arms, and the two hugged and kissed each other.

"Oh, Cora," whispered Evelyn, "we will have a double wedding, for Tom has asked me to be his wife."

"Oh, I am so glad, for your sake," returned Cora, "for Tom is such a good, brave man."

"Yes, he is—here he comes now," and as Tom Hardin entered the room Evelyn ran forward and threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Hello!" exclaimed Jack. "You have done pretty well, Tom."

"Yes," said Tom, hugging his sweetheart with one arm, and grasping Jack's hand with his right. "In hunting for Cora I found Evelyn."

Then he darted toward Cora and caught her in his arms.

"Hold on, old fellow," cried Jack, good-naturedly. "I have taken a contract to do all that for her."

"Good! Good! I congratulate both of you! But how is it that you are alive yet, Jack Conway?"

"Because I have never yet been dead," was the reply, at which they all laughed heartily.

After awhile, Jack and Tom took leave of the ladies and left the cottage, promising to call in the morning after breakfast. Evelyn remained with Cora and her mother.

Out on the street Jack gave Tom a history of his adventures during the twenty-four hours preceding.

"I must go around to Hook and Ladder Company No. 1 and see the boys," he said, after going several blocks with Tom.

Tom went with him, and together they made a night of it with the boys.

The next morning the papers were full of the wonderful escape of Hook and Ladder Jack, and the newsboys reaped a rich harvest of pennies. People read the account and actually shook their heads, it read so much like a chapter from the "Arabian Nights."

Jack was besieged on every hand by a crowd who were anxious to see him and shake his hand. He made his way through a throng on the street to Tom Hardin's lodgings. Suddenly, as he was elbowing along, he came face to face with Skinner, the lawyer. They halted, and their eyes met. Jack sprang forward and grabbed him by the throat.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FATE OF A CLUBBER—A RIOT.

As Jack grasped him, the old lawyer exclaimed:

"Hands off, sir! Hands off! What do you mean?"

"Hands off!" sneered Jack. "Why, you weazen-faced old thief, I could crush you to powder by laying a hand on you."

"That's actionable! The word 'thief' is actionable! You took hold of me, laid violent hands on me! I will have the law on you!"

"Just what I am going to do with you, you old Chinese stink-pot!" said Jack, shaking him until his false teeth rattled in his head. "You were the instigator of this abduction."

"Prove it, sir. Prove it, sir," said the wily old lawyer. "I have an action against you for slander. Yes, for slander, sir!"

"Of course, you will. I hope you will have good cause, too. I will take you in now to the sheriff's office to see that you don't get away before I get a warrant out for you," and with then he dragged the old villain by the coat collar toward the court-house, where he intended to get out a warrant for his arrest.

Skinner resisted, and protested, but in vain. Jack was as strong as a giant and inexorable. He dragged him along as though he were but a ten year old boy.

"Help! help!" cried Skinner. "I am being kidnapped by a—"

"You are a kidnapper yourself," said Jack, shaking him up as a dog shakes a rat.

"Hello!" exclaimed a stalwart policeman, running up in the crowd, "what are you doing to that old man?"

"Taking him to the sheriff's office," said Jack.

"What for?"

"To have him arrested."

"Are you an officer?"

"No."

"Detective?"

"No; not a licensed one."

"Have you a warrant for his arrest?"

"No."

"Then I will arrest you!" said the policeman, laying a hand on Jack's shoulder. "Come along with me."

"All right. But take this old villain, too."

"I have got nothing to do with him. You are the one I want. Come along!"

"Then I will take him. You can take me, if you like," said Jack, and he held on to the lawyer with a tenacious grip. He went along quietly enough with the officer.

But Skinner was not so disposed. The presence of the officer emboldened him to struggle and make as much trouble and excitement as possible.

"Let him go, and come along!" commanded the officer rather gruffly.

"No, sir," said Jack resolutely. "I will carry him in dead or alive."

"See here! I will give you a taste of the locust, young man, if——"

"I have not refused to go with you," said Jack, "so if you strike me, you do so at your own peril."

"Do you threaten me?"

"No. Not at all. I simply warn you."

"Oh, you do, eh? Whack!"

The locust descended on Jack's head with such force as to stagger him for a moment—but for a moment only. Then the daring young fireman, aroused to fierce indignation, sprang forward, directed the clubber a stunning blow on the nose, following it up with a rapid series of well-directed "mashers" straight from the shoulder, and he went down all in a heap. His face was battered to a jelly, and blood was nearly all over him.

The policeman staggered to his feet and glared at the young tiger like one in a dream.

"Do you want to club me again?"

The officer rapped for assistance.

Two of the other officers ran up, and seeing one of the force looking as though he had tackled a Bengal tiger, asked who did it.

"That fellow there," he said, pointing to Jack.

They both fell upon him with savage fury and were about to club him when several of the crowd rushed in and knocked them clean out of time.

Then it began to look as though a riot would be the result.

The crowd increased to thousands and a whole platoon of police was ordered out to disperse the people.

Jack hastened to the mayor's office and frankly told him how the thing happened.

The mayor knew him personally, and said to him:

"You did right. He had no right to strike you, and I am glad you punished him as you did. I hope you will prefer charges against him before the proper tribunal."

"I think I have had satisfaction enough out of him."

CHAPTER XXIX.

SKINNER SHOWS HIS HAND—JACK AND CORA SUDDENLY MARRY TO BEAT HIM.

When the policeman struck Jack, and staggered him for the moment, Skinner seized the opportunity to dart away and make his escape in the fast gathering crowd.

No one seemed to notice him, and thus he got away.

Jack made an effort to detain him after being struck by the locust. But he only cared then to punish his assailant, and he did so to his entire satisfaction.

After Jack's interview with the mayor, he returned to headquarters, where the constable of the town was waiting for him.

"Mr. Conway, I have a warrant for your arrest. You are my prisoner."

Jack was astonished.

"I am a law-abiding citizen," he said, "but I would like to know for what I am arrested."

"For assault and battery, and for false imprisonment, sworn out against you by one Abram Skinner."

Jack was amazed.

He gave a prolonged whistle, expressive of astonishment.

"All right. Go ahead. I will get a chance at him, maybe, if he comes into court."

Jack went along quietly with the constable to the office of the judge, and gave bail for his appearance at court when wanted.

Then, when released on bail, he swore out a warrant for the arrest of Abram Skinner for abduction and conspiracy.

On that warrant, Skinner was arrested and brought into court.

Jack employed one of the best lawyers in the city, who made him bring Cora Edgeworth forward to testify against him.

The wily old lawyer defended himself. He was his own counsel, and soon proved himself a match for any Jack could bring against him.

Cora told of her abduction in the carriage, giving all the details, as already known to the reader. She told of the visits of the old villain to the asylum, and of his attempts to inveigle her into a marriage with him, by telling her that she would have to remain there for life unless she became his wife.

Skinner cross-examined her himself.

"Miss Edgeworth, you signed a paper in the asylum, which Dr. Glumm witnessed. Is this the paper?"

"It looks like it."

"Is that your signature?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your honor," said Skinner, turning to the judge. "I will read you the contents of the document, and leave it for your honor to say whether or not this lady has the legal right to testify in this case:

"Waterville, Oct. 16, 18—.

"This is to certify that I, Cora Edgeworth, with a full knowledge of the feelings of my heart, have agreed to, and do hereby become, the wife of Abram Skinner, and promise to marry him under legal forms within thirty days from this date. Witness my hand, this sixteenth day of October, 18—.

"Cora Edgeworth.

"Witness: Heinrich Glumm, M. D."

"Judge! Judge!" cried Cora springing to her feet, her eyes flashing and face flushed. "I never signed such an agreement. It is a forgery."

"Your honor," said Skinner, "the lady has been tampered with and now tries to go back on her promise. She acknowledged the signature as hers, and if that does not satisfy your honor, Dr. Glumm is in court ready to swear that she did sign it, with a full knowledge of its contents."

"May it please your Honor," said Jack's lawyer, "we will recall the plaintiff and have her explain the signing of this paper."

The judge consented, and Cora went on the stand again and explained that she signed the paper under the impression that it was an application to the court to be released from the insane asylum; that Skinner wrote it in her presence and that she believed that it was what she had ordered written—that she had sent for a lawyer for that very purpose.

While she was on the witness stand, Jack sent a friend out with a note. Whilst the friend was gone, Jack held a whispered conversation with the clerk of the court, who took out a blank, wrote on it, received a fee from Jack and then gave him the paper.

Jack then went around to where Evelyn Cassel and Tom Hardin were sitting together and whispered with them for a few moments.

Evelyn was greatly excited but kept her seat by Tom's side.

The moment that Cora left the witness stand, the judge decided that under the circumstances she could not testify in the case, and that he would have to ——

"May it please your honor," cried Jack's attorney, springing to his feet, "we ask for a delay of ten minutes in order to have a person here who will put a different face on the matter."

"Who is he? Who is he?" demanded Skinner.

"Never mind, sir. He will be here in ten minutes if his honor will grant the delay, and ——"

"The delay is granted," said the judge, looking at his watch.

"Thanks, your honor."

Evelyn ran to Cora and whispered something in her ear. She blushed, started to her feet, and then followed Cora into the next room. Jack and his lawyer and Tom Hardin followed.

The messenger Jack had sent out, had returned, accompanied by a minister. He was Cora's pastor.

"Oh, Mr. Owens!" said Cora on seeing him. "Are you here?"

"Yes, I was sent for."

"Cora," said Jack, taking her hand in his, "that old villain beats us unless you marry me inside of ten minutes. Here is the license and your pastor is on hand. We can have a blow-out afterwards, if you wish, when Tom and Evelyn ——"

"Oh, this is so sudden!"

"I know it is, but we must not let him beat us."

"No—of course not. I am ready."

"Proceed, Mr. Owens," said Jack, taking her hand in his.

The minister proceeded, and in just two minutes Jack Conway and Cora Edgeworth were pronounced man and wife!

Jack kissed his bride, and then said to the man of God:

"Fill out the blank, quick. Here is your fee," placing the gold coin in the minister's hand.

When the pastor handed the lawyer the certificate of marriage, duly signed, the latter said:

"We have just one minute to spare! Follow me, all of you!"

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW A MARRIAGE TURNED THE TABLES.

The entire party, including the minister, repaired to the court room where the judge was waiting on the bench.

"May it please your honor," said Skinner, "the time allowed plaintiff has expired."

"Yes," said the court. "Where is the promised witness?"

"Here he is, your honor," said Jack's lawyer, "the Rev. Mr. Owens, the pastor of the church in Meadow Lane," and he conducted the minister to the witness stand.

"I demand to know what is expected to be proved by this witness," exclaimed Skinner.

"We intend to prove by him that the plaintiff is married to Mr. Jack Conway," was the reply of the young lawyer.

"It is false!" screamed Skinner, livid with rage.

"Silence in the court!" cried the court officer.

"Let the witness testify," said the judge.

The minister testified to having married them only a few minutes before.

"And here is the certificate, your honor," cried the young lawyer, waving the paper above his head.

Skinner yelled.

He saw that the tables had been turned on him.

Livid with rage and hate, he shrieked like a madman. But in the terrific din, no one could make out what he said.

Suddenly, on seeing a smile on Jack Conway's face, he lost all control of himself. He drew a dirk knife from his pocket and sprang forward toward Jack.

The sight instantly quieted the yelling spectators, for the flash of the knife told that death was near for some one.

Jack sprang forward to meet him.

He grasped the up-raised arm in a grip and pressed him back over a bench until his neck rested against it. Then he gave him a terrific blow between the eyes that sent his head back with such force as to break his neck.

Jack heard it snap.

He instantly knew that he had killed the wretch.

The body sunk in a heap on the floor.

It was all over in some twenty seconds.

"Your honor," cried Jack, looking at the judge, "I have killed him!"

They picked him up and found him dead. His neck was broken.

The most intense excitement prevailed in the court-room. While men gazed upon the face of the dead and shuddered, others congratulated the newly-married couple but a few feet away.

Cora was pale, but calm.

She stood it bravely, yet she turned to Jack and said:

"This is awful Jack. Can't we go away from here?"

"Yes, darling. I will see my lawyer about it."

The lawyer said that death ended the case, and that he would look after his interest until it was properly dismissed.

"Go," he said to the happy couple, "and be as happy as you both deserve."

Jack took his bride by the hand and led her out of the court-room. The crowd followed.

Out on the street, the carriage which had brought Cora and Evelyn to the court house was surrounded, the horses unhitched and led away, whilst the enthusiastic admirers of the young fireman prepared to draw it themselves.

Tom and Evelyn were forced to enter it with the young couple, and thus the procession started. They went through the streets cheering lustily. Immense crowds followed, and the news of the marriage of the daring young fireman and the death of the old lawyer flew from mouth to mouth.

"Evelyn, dear," said Cora to her friend as they were drawn in triumph through the streets, "you have been my friend through all my trouble. I want you to be as happy as I am. You and Mr. Hardin must send for Mr. Owens and be married at our house as soon as we get there. Jack and I were to stand up with you. You know we are to have a double wedding."

Evelyn was blushing rosy red, and buried her face on Cora's shoulder. She could say nothing. It was for Tom to say. He was equal to the emergency.

"I agree to all that," he said, drawing Evelyn to him. "What say you, dear? Shall we travel the same road with Jack and Cora? Will you make me as happy as he is?"

"Yes," she murmured.

The widow was astonished to see the multitude returning, pulling the carriage after them. She thought Jack had gained the case against the old lawyer and that his friends were pulling him back in triumph. She little dreamed of all that had transpired so quickly.

The carriage stopped before the cottage, and Jack assisted Cora out, as Tom did Evelyn. Then giving three cheers and

a tiger for the gallant fireman and his bride, the crowd dispersed.

Cora rushed into the house, and throwing herself into her mother's arms, exclaimed:

"Oh, mother! Jack has killed Mr. Skinner and married me!"

"Mercy on me!" gasped the mother, bewildered at such a peculiarly mixed announcement.

"Yes, I am Jack's wife, and Mr. Skinner is dead. Jack broke his neck and—married me."

The happy girl hugged and kissed her mother a dozen times.

Of course, the mother was happy, too. Her daughter now had a brave protector in the man she loved, and was happy. That was all she wanted. She gave them her blessing.

The minister came, and in the little parlor of the Edgeworth cottage, united Tom and Evelyn in the holy bond of matrimony. Cora was all the happier that her friend was married to the man she loved, and two happier brides were never seen anywhere.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONCLUSION.

The judge publicly declared from the bench that, having been a witness to the tragedy, Jack Conway was in nowise to blame, acting solely in self-defense against a man with a weapon in his hands.

As soon as she heard of the marriage of the gallant fireman, Mrs. Huntington, the rich old lady, whose life he so miraculously saved by carrying her through the passage to the adjoining house, drove to the Edgeworth cottage in her carriage, and called for the bride.

Jack was not present, but Cora showed her into the neat little parlor.

"You are Cora Edgeworth?" she asked.

"No, ma'am, I am Cora Conway," was the reply. "I was married yesterday."

"You love your husband?"

"More than my own life."

"God bless him!" murmured the old lady, tears coming in her eyes. "I am old and cannot live many years longer. I have a great deal of property in Waterville and more money than I knew what to do with. I have brought you a present. It is the deed to a pretty cottage on ——— street, with its contents. It is all yours, in your own name. My blessing to you both goes with it."

She placed the deed in Cora's hand and the keys to the house.

Cora burst into tears and threw her arms around the kind old lady's neck.

"How can I thank you?" she sobbed.

"Don't try to do it, my dear. Your tears do enough."

"I—I—accept it for Jack's sake and yours."

"Thanks. Give him my blessing when he comes in. Now, let me see and get acquainted with your mother."

Mrs. Edgeworth was called.

Of course, she added her thanks to Cora's and promised to visit her at an early day.

Mrs. Huntington then took leave of them and returned to her carriage.

Jack was astonished when he came home and found his bride the owner of a ten-thousand-dollar cottage in the fashionable part of the city.

"I didn't expect such a dowry, darling," he said, kissing her tenderly. "We will go and take possession to-morrow."

The next day they moved into their new house. It was elegantly furnished. Mrs. Edgeworth gave all her old furniture to Evelyn and Tom to commence housekeeping on.

"Now, dear," said Jack, after they had settled down, "I will go to my old bachelor quarters and pack up everything there and bring them up to the house."

He went down to his old quarters and packed up everything. There were many old garments on which there was still the smell of fire.

"This old jacket," he said, "was the one I wore the night I rescued old Skinner from the fire. The old villain is in a hotter fire now, I guess, if the Bible is true. It was completely ruined. That hair chain Cora made of her hair and gave to me, was destroyed at the same time. Ah! here are some of the old letters and papers that Skinner dropped that night. I remember picking them up and putting them in my pocket. Never thought of them again. He has no use for them now. Here's a letter from a New York law firm—Grabb & Holder. I will read it. Maybe they would like to know what became of the old rascal. Why! Holy smoke! What does this mean? They write to him to find out where Cora Edgeworth is! Heavens and all the angels! She is the daughter of an English nobleman and heir to all his estate! She never told me of this! Whew! I must be dreaming!"

He had found the letter that had caused old Skinner to take such desperate steps to make Cora Edgeworth become his wife. So surprised was he, that he sat down and read it over again and again.

"I begin to understand it all now," he finally said. "I see why he wanted to marry Cora. Great God, what a villain he was! I am glad I broke his neck for him. I will take this down to Mrs. Edgeworth."

He ran almost all the way, so eager was he to give it to Cora's mother.

After explaining to Mrs. Edgeworth how he came in possession of the letter, he gave it to her. She read it calmly through and then handed it to Cora, who read it as calmly as her mother had done.

Turning to Jack, she said:

"I can show you how much I love you, dear Jack. All that I have is yours. You are the equal of any nobleman in England. My grandfather was cruel to my mother. This property should be hers. She will have all she wants of it," and she kissed her mother as she spoke.

Reader, this is a true story, in the main. Jack took his bride and her mother to England, and they had but little trouble in gaining possession of the estate.

Evelyn and Tom went with them. They are all there to-day—rich, prosperous, and happy, with a flock of children around them that they dearly love. In their prosperity, they do not forget the daring adventures of Hook and Ladder Jack, the daring young fireman.

THE END.

Read "ICEBOUND; OR, AMONG THE FLOES," by Berton Bertrew, which will be the next number (241) of "Pluck and Luck."

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